



Drawn & Engraved by T. Hill, Boston.

Reverend John Clarke, D.D.

Died April 20, 1798, aged 43.

Published by HALL & HILLER, in Cornhill, BOSTON.



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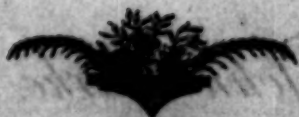
BY THE LATE

REVEREND JOHN CLARKE, D.D.

MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN BOSTON,

MASSACHUSETTS.

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JULY, 1799.

S. E. R. M. O. N. S.

OF THE LATE

REVEREND JOHN CLARKE, D.D.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN AUSTRIA



BOSTON:

1850.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following posthumous Sermons are selected from the numerous weekly productions of the author, written for the instruction of his people, and not with any view to publication. They are printed at the earnest desire of those, who were impressed with the excellency of his preaching; and who conceived that a compliance with this desire would not merely gratify the partiality of friendship; but serve to perpetuate the memory of eminent worth, promote the general edification, and confer honour upon the American pulpit. The selection has been made with a joint regard to merit in composition, and importance in matter. Whilst it was judged that fidelity to the original forbade any alterations, concern for the literary reputation of the author was relieved by the knowledge of his remarkable correctness in whatever he wrote, and a consequent belief that a volume of his discourses would appear with greater advantage than most posthumous productions. Should this work meet the favourable reception expected, it is contemplated to publish another small volume of Sermons, addressed to the young, and which the public would probably have received from the author's own hand, had he lived to execute his intention.

A
SHORT ACCOUNT

OF
Doctor CLARKE,

By a late eminent DIVINE and AUTHOR.

JOHAN CLARKE, D.D. A.A.S. Pastor of the First Church in Boston, was born at Portsmouth, in New-Hampshire, April 13, 1755; graduated at Harvard College in 1774; and ordained July 8, 1778, as colleague with the late Dr. CHAUNCEY, with whom he lived in the most intimate and respectful friendship about nine years; and afterwards continued, assiduously and faithfully labouring in the service of the Church, until the Lord's-day, April 1, 1798; when, in the midst of his afternoon sermon, he was suddenly seized with an apoplexy, fell down in the pulpit, and expired in less than twelve hours; having almost completed the 43d year of his age, and the 20th year of his ministry.

DESCENDED from respectable parents, who live to lament an only son, he discovered in early life the signs of genius and industry. At the University he was distinguished by a close attention to classic and philosophic studies, by a strict obedience to the laws, and by irreproachable morals. In the office of preceptor, he was gentle and persuasive, beloved by his pupils, and esteemed by their friends. As a public preacher, his compositions bore the marks of penetration, judgment, perspicuity, and elegance. Faithful to the interest of religion, he deeply examined its foundation and evidence; and persuaded of the truth and importance of the Christian system, he recommended,

ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

recommended, by his public discourses and private conversation, its sublime doctrines, its wise institutions, and its salutary precepts.

THOUGH fond of polite literature and philosophic researches, yet he considered theology as the proper science of a Gospel Minister. To this object he principally devoted his time and studies, and was earnestly desirous of investigating every branch of it, not merely to gratify his own sacred curiosity, but that he might impart to his hearers the whole counsel of God. He was habitually a close student ; and it is not improbable, that the intenseness of his mental application proved too severe for the delicate fabric of his nerves.

His devotional addresses were copious and fervent ; and his intercessions strong and affectionate, discovering at once the ardour of his piety, and the warmth of his benevolence. In the private offices of pastoral friendship, he was truly exemplary and engaging.—His temper was mild and cheerful ; his manners easy and polite ; and the social virtues of an honest heart gave a glow to his language, and enlivened every circle in which he was conversant.

In the relations of a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a guardian, a correspondent, a master, a friend, and a member of several literary and charitable societies, his deportment was marked with affection, fidelity and carefulness. He was concerned for the interest, reputation and happiness of all his connexions ; and zealously devoted to the cause of science and humanity.

BEING successor to *ten* eminent luminaries of the church of God, he was studious to emulate them in piety, learning, and usefulness. Like three of them, he was suddenly called off from his ministerial labours ;

VI ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

hours; and having happily escaped the painful agonies of a lingering death, is gone to receive the reward of a faithful servant, and enter into the joy of his Lord.

THE names of his predecessors, the order of their succession, and their ages (as far as they are known) are as follow:

- A. D. 1632 JOHN WILSON, 1667, *Æt.* 79.
 1633 JOHN COTTON, 1656, *Æt.* 68.
 1656 JOHN NORTON, 1663, *Æt.* 57.
 1668 { JOHN DAVENPORT, 1670, *Æt.* 72.
 { JAMES ALLEN; 1710, *Æt.* 78.
 1670 JOHN OXENBRIDGE, 1674, *Æt.* 66.
 1696 BENJAMIN WADSWORTH, removed to
 the Presidency of Harvard College, 1725,
 and died 1737, *Æt.* 68.
 1705 THOMAS BRIDGE, 1715, *Æt.* 58.
 1717 THOMAS FOXCROFT, 1769, *Æt.* 73.
 1727 CHARLES CHAUNCY, D.D. 1787, *Æt.* 83.
 Besides two assistant ministers, viz.
 1684 JOSHUA MOODY, returned to Portf-
 mouth, 1692.
 1693 JOHN BAILEY, 1697, *Æt.* 54.

MR. NORTON died very suddenly on the Lord's day, as he was preparing for the afternoon exercise. Mr. OXENBRIDGE fell down in the pulpit, with an apoplexy, and died in four days. Mr. FOXCROFT was seized with the same disorder on a Saturday, and died the next day.

DR. CLARKE's printed works are, four Sermons; one on the death of Dr. COOPER, one on the death of Dr. CHAUNCY, one on the death of Dr. N. W. AP-
 PLETON, and one before the Humane Society: An answer to the question, Why are you a Christian? (which has had three editions in Boston, and four in England); and Letters to a Student at the University of Cambridge. 15 OC 61

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Sermon I.

The Security of a virtuous Course.

—•••••—
PROVERBS X. 9.

“HE THAT WALKETH UPRIGHTLY, WALKETH
SURELY.”



AMONG all the moral observations, ascribed to the wise man, there is not *one* more deserving of our serious and habitual attention, than that which I have selected as the subject of this discourse. To some, indeed, it may appear, that the mere *safety* of a virtuous course is not its highest recommendation. If it be connected with peace of mind, with true honour, with real dignity, with the favour of God in this world, and with eternal happiness in that which is to come, they will ask, why is it not enforced by these more powerful considerations? Why are we told, that *he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely*, when we might be told, that the path of virtue is the direct way to heaven?

To this I answer, Of such infinite importance is a course of obedience, that every possible argument ought to be produced in its favour. Discouraging to
B
Christians,

Christians, it is highly proper to inform them, that, by *walking uprightly*, they will lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come. Obedience will certainly meet with a heavenly reward. Such is the munificence of God, that a patient continuance in well-doing, though it will not give a legal claim to immortal felicity, will nevertheless qualify us for this unspeakable blessing. The Saviour of men has prepared the way for the most extensive exercise of benevolence. And of the fruits of this benevolence, they will hereafter partake, who walk, not according to the course of this world, but the dictates of an honest and virtuous mind. The gospel teaches us to entertain these expectations; and, by the resurrection of its author, we are confirmed in the hope set before us.

BUT, admitting the truth of this representation, still, I would ask, why may not the *safety* attending it, be brought as one argument in favour of a good life? Why may not the upright be informed that *they* tread on sure ground? Why may they not be told, that let religion be true or false, they can be no losers by their virtue? Certainly, this is a very important idea; and it ought to be urged with all earnestness upon every Christian. For no man knows what doubts or difficulties may rise up in his mind, or how he may be perplexed by the different systems of religion which prevail in the world. But still, he will be in no real danger if impressed with the *safety* of a virtuous life. So long as he governs himself by this maxim, that *he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely*, the great ends of religion will be answered, and his best interest finally secured.

UNDER the fullest conviction of this truth, I would ask your particular attention to the words of the text.

text. The terms used by the wise man, I shall first explain ; and then enlarge on the sentiment inculcated. To *walk*, in the scripture style, is to lead a particular course of life. Thus to walk honestly or deceitfully, to walk in light or darkness, is to *live* righteously or wickedly in the world. Accordingly, we read that " Enoch walked with God : " the meaning is, that he lived piously ; that he did not fall into the prevailing sins of his generation, but set an example of godliness and virtue. On the other hand, St. John says, " He that hateth his brother, walketh in darkness ; " in other words, is no good Christian, but goes on in a course of life directly contrary to the gospel. In like manner the word is used in the text. To walk uprightly is to have a constant regard to God, and his commandments, in the general course of life. It is to persevere in the steady practice of all religious duty. It is, in short, to be an habitually *good man*. Such an one *walketh surely*, that is, acts a safe part, is not in danger of losing his best interest, or bringing upon him any disgrace or misery beyond the grave. The sum, then, of the wise man's observation is this, that he, who, in the whole course of his life, acts sincerely and justly, soberly and devoutly ; who is, not in *appearance* only, but in *reality*, a good man ; that such a person will be finally secure, whatever may be the course of human events. In this state of darkness and uncertainty he hazards nothing. And he can lose nothing, let the final issue of things be what it may.

I SHALL now endeavour to illustrate and confirm this point ; and then recommend an upright or religious life by the perfect security which attends it.

AND, in order to enter into the full spirit of the text, let us suppose, that some truths, admitted by
Christians,

Christians, are involved in a degree of uncertainty. Let us, for instance, take it for granted, that even Christianity itself could not be so defended as to remove all doubt, and produce a perfect acquiescence in its sacred original ; yet, even on this supposition, it would be the safest part to regard it as a divine revelation, and to *walk uprightly* according to its laws. For what can a man lose by being a Christian ? By observing the precepts, and following the virtuous example of Jesus Christ, what injury can he bring on himself ? Will it render him less respectable ? No. Will it hurt his worldly business ? No. Will it unfit him for a place of honour, or for a public employment ? No. Will he be less happy with his neighbours ? No. Less happy within his own domestic circle ? By no means. Can any conceivable disadvantage arise from a course of living strictly conformable to the laws of the gospel ? It is presumed, not any. So far from it, our honour, our peace, our happiness must be essentially promoted by an observance of those laws.

THIS being the case, to walk like a Christian is to walk surely ; whilst, on the other hand, to walk differently, is to enter on a path beset with dangers, and which may, to say the least, conduct to perdition. The religion of Jesus is from heaven, or it is of men. If from heaven, then, by submitting to its laws, we discharge an indispensable duty. We obey God, and do that, which is right in itself, and right in his eyes. But we incur no guilt, if our religion be of men ; our obedience, in this case, will not be imputed to us a crime. Our moral governor will never reproach us, because we directed our lives by a rule, which we imagined he had prescribed.

IN this view, then, the upright man has every advantage.

vantage. He may be a great gainer, but he cannot lose. On the other hand, he, who does *not* walk uprightly, may be a great loser, but he cannot gain. As God will not condemn the former for obeying, neither will he applaud the latter for rejecting Christianity, even should it be false. But should it be true, the Christian has every thing to hope, the infidel every thing to fear. The account, then, stands thus on the side of the upright man; *no loss*, but *probable gain*; on the other side, *no conceivable gain*, but *probable loss*. From this comparison, is it not manifest, then, that *he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely?*

AGAIN—To give the argument still greater force, let us suppose that with Christianity in general, we give up the certainty of a future state. Let us imagine that the arguments in favour of it rise no higher than to probable evidence; still, in this view of the subject, it would be the part of wisdom to walk uprightly. I will go farther: If it be only *possible* that we may exist hereafter, prudence would dictate a virtuous life; for, if death should be our utter destruction, we shall not be in a worse condition than the rest of our species; but should it prove a mere transition to another mode of being, we may be assured that our condition will be far better. It is not possible to doubt, but that the practice of religion is the means proper to be used, in order to be happy.

BEYOND death we shall, then, exist, or we shall *not*. If annihilation is to be our fate, we have lost nothing by leading sober and exemplary lives. In this world we have as largely partaken of true enjoyment as other men; and like them we shall lie down, and awake no more. The worst then that can happen to those who walk uprightly, is to fare as well as the wicked. But should there be a future state of retribution,

bution, what a triumph will they then gain? Having acted the part of Christians, they will have their reward; God will make a visible distinction between them and others; and the virtuous habits here formed will qualify them for eternal blessedness.

OBSERVE, then, the true state of the case. We are all called to walk uprightly. But some will say, are we sure of a future reward? The Christian will answer in the affirmative; but could we doubt it, this would not set aside the obligation. We are certainly bound in duty to expose ourselves to as few dangers as possible; and it is manifest that we act cautiously when we act virtuously. Should a person in trade engage in a branch of business, in which the worst that could happen to him would be to keep his stock whole, we should certainly think that his interest was secure. On the other hand, should he pursue a branch in which this would be his best prospect, we should esteem him in a very insecure situation. This is precisely the case with a good and bad man, on supposition that we may, or may not, exist hereafter. The former may be highly benefitted, but cannot possibly be injured by his virtue. The latter may be ruined by his vices, but cannot turn them to any possible future advantage. The worst evil that can happen to a good man is to be annihilated; and this is the highest blessing that a bad man can expect or wish for. To walk uprightly is unquestionably then to walk surely; and he who conducts after this manner is perfectly safe, even though a future state of being could not be demonstrated.

THE words of an eminent christian philosopher, in regard to this subject, are so pertinent and so striking, that you will permit me to quote them. "There are (says he) few speculative and inquiring men, who

“ who do not sometimes find themselves in a state of
“ dejection, which takes from them much of the sat-
“ isfaction arising from their faith in very important
“ and interesting truths. Happy, indeed, is the per-
“ son who enjoys a flow of spirits so even and con-
“ stant as never to have experienced this. Of myself,
“ I must say, that I have been far from being so hap-
“ py. Doubts and difficulties have often perplexed
“ me, and thrown a cloud over truths, which, in the
“ general course of my life, are my support and con-
“ solation. There are, however, many truths, the
“ conviction of which I never lose. One conviction
“ in particular, remains with me, amidst all fluctu-
“ ations of temper and spirits : I mean, my belief of
“ this maxim, that “ *he who walketh uprightly, walketh*
“ *surely.*” There has not been a moment, in which
“ I have found it possible to doubt, whether the
“ wisest and best course I can take, is to practise vir-
“ tue and to avoid guilt. Low spirits can only give
“ new force to this conviction, and cause it to make
“ a deeper impression. Uncertainty, in other in-
“ stances, creates certainty here. For, the more
“ dark and doubtful our state under God’s govern-
“ ment is, the more prudent it must be to choose
“ that course which is the safest.”

THUS have I considered the observation in the text as a rule for those who have their doubts respecting revelation and a future state ; and to them it is of great importance to walk uprightly. In this case they will take the safe side ; but should they live in sin, they will offend against all those rules of prudence, which govern them in the common concerns of life, and which ought always to regulate the actions of a reasonable being. For, as I have repeatedly observed, vice can secure to them no possible good ;

good ; and, on their own principles, it may prove their ruin.

I NOW proceed to consider the doctrine of the wise man, as it should affect those who acknowledge the gospel, and are firmly persuaded of a future state of existence. Unhappy for the cause of truth, many different and jarring opinions divide those who call themselves Christians. This has given great disgust to some captious minds. The ill-disposed it has emboldened openly to deride the whole system ; and in many serious minds it has created the utmost perplexity ; but if we only resolve to walk uprightly, it cannot go ill with us in the end. In the final issue of things, good works will essentially profit us, however the controversy about them may be decided. Though some may say, that we are justified by faith alone ; others, that faith must be an active principle ; others again, that we are freely justified by grace ; yet we cannot mistake, if we fear God, and work righteousness. In this case, we shall certainly be accepted of him, however perplexed our religious opinions may be.

So with respect to the future punishment of sin, there is a great variety of opinions among Christians. Some suppose, that the sinner, however abandoned in life, and hardened at death, will be surprised with a free and full pardon at the judgment-day. Others maintain, that the wicked will never be raised from their graves, and that annihilation at death will be their portion. Others maintain, that they will be punished in proportion to the guilt contracted, and that their punishment will work a moral cure. Others contend, that, after ages of inexpressible torment, they will be blotted out of being. And finally, there are those who consider all future punishment is vindictive,

dictive, and maintain that such as die in their sins will smart forever under the chastening hand of God, and will be exhibited to the view of creation as monuments of God's eternal displeasure against sin. To one or other of these opinions most Christians will assent; but which ever they may embrace, it will still remain an eternal truth, that "he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely."

A MAN cannot plead, that the controversies on this head have so bewildered him that he is at a loss what course to take; for the safety of a good life remains undisputed. If he cannot look so far into futurity, as to make up his own opinion as to the wages of sin, he can see so far before him, as to perceive the absolute security of virtue. Here can be no dispute. Every man must know, that by walking uprightly, he shall escape the future consequences of moral evil, whether those consequences be more or less terrible. Whatever the curse of the law may be, whether temporary or endless suffering, whether discipline or destruction, that curse will never be executed on him, who devotes himself to God and his duty. This consideration should therefore effectually dispose to a life of religion, because on every principle it is safe.

PERMIT me, then, to recommend an upright or religious course of behaviour by the *perfect security* with which it is attended. In the practice of sin, it is impossible that any man, who reflects, should think or feel himself secure. He may endeavour to persuade himself that there is no God, no providence, no moral government; yet there will be moments in which he will tremble. He may labour to believe that there will be no future state of retribution, yet he will not be able to expel the idea from his mind. He may exert himself to overcome all apprehensions
C of

of a place of punishment, yet he will never gain a complete victory over his fears. Religion, with its awful truths, will often haunt his imagination; and so long as he walks according to the course of this world, he will feel insecure.

How important, then, is it that we walk uprightly? Do we wish to be out of the reach of any possible danger, then let us avoid every false and evil way. If we cultivate the temper, and practise the duties of Christians, what can harm us? By walking uprightly, we shall be sure of the approbation of our own minds; by walking soberly and righteously, we shall probably secure the approbation of others. But this is certain, if we fear him, and keep his commandments, we shall assuredly be approved of God. He is a being of infinite rectitude. Abundant proofs has he given, that he loves righteousness, and hates iniquity; and this disposition will be still more clearly manifested, when his scheme of moral government shall be completed. Then will it appear, that the upright have chosen the good part; and that they have taken effectual measures, when they fail here, to secure a welcome into everlasting habitations.

LET these considerations induce every one to walk uprightly. This will be true policy, if you only regard your present interest. Would it be your choice to feel easy within, and to be tolerably satisfied with yourselves? Would it be your choice to pursue those measures which will probably raise you in society, and give you deserved importance in the eyes of others? Would it be your choice to possess yourselves of a competency, or a plenty of those outward good things, which so obviously tend to the convenience of human life? Then accept the admonition of the wise man, to *walk uprightly*. The path of virtue is plain

plain and safe; and the tendency of a regular course of behaviour is to promote our honour, our tranquillity, and happiness.

THE observation in the text is a rule for all: but to the young it is a lesson, which ought to be written in letters of gold. No words can describe the importance of beginning well. Upon our early habits often depend our usefulness and respectability in this world, and our happiness in that which is to come. You will be told, perhaps, that religion is not the proper concern of youth. You will be told, that the Supreme Being does not concern himself with the actions of his creatures; or, if he does, that he is too good to resent their misconduct. You will be told, that all the stories of a future state, and a future punishment, were invented for political purposes. You will be told, that the whole system of religion is a state-engine, and that great minds acknowledge no other religion but that of nature. Examples of prosperous wickedness will be set before you; and you will be called to observe how they succeed, who pretend not to have the fear of God before their eyes. In this age of licentiousness, many false maxims will be advanced, many audacious principles will be advocated, many libertine sentiments will be propagated, many indecent reflections will be cast upon sacred things, and many blasphemies will be uttered against the name and religion of Jesus. But let none of these things move you. Do you resolve, through that divine assistance which God has pleased to offer, that however others may choose to conduct, you will walk uprightly. Now, in the morning of life, cultivate the fear, and devote yourselves to the service of the Most High. Study to know the whole extent of your duty; and knowing the will of your moral governor,

governor, conform to it unfeignedly and without delay.

So will your integrity and uprightness preserve you. They will preserve you from the reproaches of a wounded conscience. They will preserve you from the contempt of the wise, and procure you the general approbation of mankind. The probability is, that they will preserve you from the more pressing calamities of life, even if they should not reward you with riches. But on the most unfavourable supposition, you will be safe; your best interest will be secured; nothing will materially harm you, inasmuch as you are followers of that which is good. "For the Lord is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them who walk uprightly."

Sermon II.

Excuses of the Irreligious.

LUKE XIV. 18.

"AND THEY ALL, WITH ONE CONSENT, BEGAN TO MAKE EXCUSE."

THESE words are part of the well-known parable, in which our Lord foretels the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles. Of all subjects, this was most offensive to his countrymen, and therefore he seldom introduced it in plain terms. That divine instructor always imparted truths, according

ording as his auditory could bear them. Well knowing what was in man, he graciously condescended to consult his weakness ; and he would not defeat his own labours, by disclosing secrets which were particularly obnoxious ; or by administering reproof in a manner, which could only prejudice or inflame. His consummate prudence, in this respect, will account for the many parables, with which his discourses abound.

THAT, from which I have taken the text, deserves your serious attention. Our Lord was an invited guest at the table of a pharisee. During the repast, he delivered, according to custom, many useful lessons ; nor was his conversation displeasing to those who sat with him at meat : so far from it, one of the guests was much delighted, and he could not but throw out an expression, intimating how happy he should be, could he be admitted into the kingdom of the Messiah, and partake of the entertainments which would be there provided. On this natural occasion, our Lord thought proper to remind him and the company, that many, who now professed to look for that kingdom, would hereafter oppose its establishment ; so widely would it differ from their expectations, that they would, in fact, slight and reject it. To impress this idea, he uttered the following parable.

“ A CERTAIN man made a great supper, and bade many ; and sent his servant, at supper-time, to say to them that were bidden, come, for all things are now ready. *And they all, with one consent, began to make excuse.* The first said, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it ; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them ; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife,

wife, and therefore I cannot come." All these excuses were carried to the lord. At such treatment, the master of the house was much enraged; he felt the affront which was put upon him, and highly resented the ingratitude of those, for whom so splendid an entertainment had been made. Disappointed of these guests, he resolved, however, to supply their place with others. Accordingly, he directed his servant to traverse the city, and to bring to his table any persons that he might happen to meet with, the poorest and most abject not excepted. These orders were executed, and yet the table was not filled. He therefore, once more, sent forth his servant, directing him to visit the highways and hedges, and to use the most earnest entreaty with travellers of every description, in order to induce them to become his guests. For, said he, "of those which were bidden, not one shall taste of my supper."

From a careful examination of this parable, it is easy to ascertain its meaning. The master of the house represents the blessed God. The great supper intends the dispensation of the gospel. The guests first invited are the Jews. The excuse, which they sent, intends their rejection of the gospel, when they received the gracious offer. The idle and frivolous pleas, which they respectively made, convey a lively idea of the foolish grounds on which the Jews rejected the Son of God, and the religion which he came to establish. The displeasure, testified by the master of the house, shows the just indignation of God against his chosen people. The invitation given to the poor, the lame, and blind, represents the preaching of the gospel, and the offers of salvation to the Gentiles. Poverty and misery are terms, which well describe their moral state. The direction, to
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compel them to come in, leads us to apprehend the arguments, which were employed to convince their understandings, and the various other measures to which the apostles had recourse, in order to win them over to the christian faith. And the concluding remark, that "none of them, who were first bidden, should taste of the supper," evidently refers to the rejection of the Jewish nation.

IN this view of the parable, it is a prediction of the fate of the gospel among the Jews, and the offer of it to the Gentiles; and how wonderfully was this prediction accomplished? Christ came to his own, and his own received him not. Notwithstanding the miracles, wonders, and signs, by which his divine mission was attested, yet the nation would not receive him as the expected Messiah. So far from it, they represented him as an impostor, and condemned his doctrines as heretical and impious in the highest degree. When the apostles attempted their conversion, they were equally obstinate. And thus the nation continued not only to reject, but to oppose the gospel, till they were as justly, as they were remarkably, punished for their wickedness. In the mean time, the gospel was offered to the Gentiles, and the offer was generally accepted. Churches were gathered in all parts of the Roman empire; and so greatly did Christians multiply, that paganism took the alarm, and every measure was employed to support its declining interests. Thus did the Gentiles occupy that place which had been filled by the Jews; and thus did the one partake of that spiritual entertainment which had been provided for the other.

COMPARING, then, the prediction and the event, we cannot but perceive their wonderful correspondence; and we cannot but acknowledge the wisdom
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of our Saviour in avoiding the explicit declaration of such ingrateful truths. Had they been conveyed in any other form than that of a parable, the Jews would not have borne them; consequently, his labours among that people must have been at an end. But having recourse to this innocent art, he was enabled to pursue his work; to enlighten those who were willing to be instructed; to suggest to others their danger; and to furnish his disciples with an additional proof of his divine mission. For when the event should clear up the prediction, his followers would have new reason to exclaim, "truly, this man was the son of God."

SUFFICIENT has now been said on the parable at large. Some remarks I thought necessary, in order to point out the particular connexion of those words which I have prefixed to my discourse; and to show in what sense they were used by our Saviour; but in farther prosecution of the subject, I shall consider the words themselves, without any particular reference to the parable.

AND let me say, in regard to the great concerns of religion, men are as ready to offer frivolous excuses, as were the Jews in the days of our blessed Lord. Though continually importuned to take upon them the christian profession, and to subject their temper and lives to the laws of Jesus Christ; yet there is always some obstacle in the way of their compliance. One pleads that he is too young; another that he is too far advanced; one that he is distracted with private, another with public concerns; one that he has doubts respecting the truth of Christianity, another that the system is unintelligible; one that he is confounded by the disputes of Christians, another that he is discouraged by their practices. All these, and many

many other excuses, have been offered by persons, when seriously urged to receive the gospel as the rule of their faith and practice. In order to judge of these pleas, it may be proper to give them a particular examination.

AND, to begin with that which is of most weight : some decline the gospel-offer, because they are not absolutely certain that the gospel is true. They have their doubts, and those doubts must be cleared up before they can listen to the christian invitation. But the question is, did those doubts originate in sober inquiry ? Did those, who plead them, ever examine the subject of religion ? Have they impartially weighed the internal and external evidence of the gospel ? Have they studied the prophecies, which relate to our Saviour, and the works, which he performed ? Have they perused the history of his religion, and traced its progress from infancy to its present stage ? In short, have they exhausted all the sources of information ? If they have not had recourse to these measures, their doubts will not excuse them. Being the offspring of vanity, and not of inquiry, they can be no apology for their conduct.

BUT I will suppose that they have inquired, and still profess to doubt : the question then is, whether there exists in their minds a strong presumption against the divine authority of the gospel, or only a dissatisfaction with the evidence afforded ? If the latter, it might be well to inquire, whether they do not act upon less evidence in their temporal concerns ? In the course of business, men often take measures, when they are very doubtful of the event. The merchant, the husbandman, the statesman, esteem the probability of success a sufficient motive for their exertions. Were they to insist that every doubt should

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be removed before they proceeded to action, the business of life would stand still. No voyager would trust his person, no merchant his treasure, on the ocean. The husbandman would leave his lands uncultivated; and the statesman would cease to project measures for the glory and happiness of his country.

BUT as probability is a sufficient ground of action in our temporal concerns, why not in the concerns of religion? You plead, that the subject of religion is attended with difficulties; you wish to have some points cleared up; you require greater evidence of its truth: but the question is, weighing all things, is not the balance of proof in its favour? Are you not more inclined to believe that the religion of Jesus is divine, than that it is a cunningly devised fable? If so, you ought to make it your rule of life. To be consistent, you ought to be a Christian in temper and practice; for you hazard nothing by a course of evangelical obedience. But you hazard every thing if you reject the gospel, whilst you acknowledge, that, in point of evidence, there is a presumption in its favour. Doubts, therefore, even where they honestly arise, are not a sufficient excuse for declining the gospel-offer. So long as men act in defiance of doubts, in the common pursuits of life, it will be in vain to urge them, where religion is concerned.

AGAIN—That our private and public engagements are such, that we have no time for religion, is a plea, which will by no means operate to our justification. For what right has the world to such a portion of our time and thoughts? Why do we suffer our minds to be so distracted by its inferior concerns? That present objects should have such a dominion over us is itself a crime. And would it not be very extraordinary if one crime were an excuse for another?

other? But the plea itself is, to the last degree, absurd. It is grounded on the supposition, that religion is a business by itself; that there are times and seasons for it; and that it is as wholly disconnected with the pursuits of life, as one profession is unlike another. But this is one of the greatest and most dangerous of errors. It is the parent of superstition; and it is the source of those numerous supereries, by which religion has been disgraced, and its influence defeated.

HOWEVER employed, in whatever sphere a person may move, whether his engagements be of a public or private nature, still he is under no necessity to neglect the duties of religion. Religion should mingle itself with every pleasure and pursuit of life. And let me observe, a man may be as religious, when following his lawful calling, as when engaged in the worship of God. He, who endeavours to maintain his family, to discharge his debts, and to requite society for the benefits derived from it; he, who by every honest measure, studies his own independence and the public good; he, in short, who, in all his transactions, makes conscience of speaking the truth, and doing that, which is right; he is the religious man. To read, to meditate, and pray, are but a part of our duty. The gospel, it is true, lays great stress on devotion. But it lays equal stress on moral honesty, on veracity, on benevolence, on humility, on patience, on meekness, on chastity, and on every thing, which can adorn and exalt human nature. When, therefore, we display these virtues, we display genuine features of the christian character.

ADMITTING this representation, what can be more absurd, than the excuse now under examination? A man pleads, that he has not time to attend to religion;

ligion ; that is, his business is of so distracting a nature, his thoughts are so employed, and his hours so occupied, that he cannot do justly and exercise mercy ; cannot speak the truth ; cannot regulate his appetites and passions ; cannot observe the rules of temperance ; cannot do those things, which are lovely and of good report ! How would such an extraordinary plea be received at a human tribunal ? If it would not excuse us to the civil magistrate, it certainly would not to the righteous God.

BUT, it will be replied, that they, who offer this excuse, intend no more than this, that their avocations will not permit them to attend to those means, by which a religious character is formed. They have not time to study the word of God, and to meditate on his perfections. They have not time to assist at his worship, or to maintain a more private intercourse with him. To this I answer, a very small degree of economy on their part, would remove this difficulty. We can always redeem time for inferior purposes. We can find hours for relaxation and amusement. And I am confident, we might so manage our time, as to reserve some portion for the religious cultivation of our heart. However careful and troubled about worldly things, there is no man, who, if so disposed, may not secure the good part, which will never be taken from him.

ANOTHER excuse for neglecting religion is the disputes, which have divided its professors. It is urged, that Christians cannot agree among themselves ; that what is heresy with one, is orthodoxy with others ; and, amidst so many jarring opinions, that it must be impossible ever to discover the truth. To this I would reply, that Christians differ less in reality than in appearance. And, where the difference is real, it is

is not of that moment, which some are ready to imagine. The leading facts, the essential doctrines, and the moral precepts of Christianity, have given occasion to few disputes. If we examine the various sects into which the christian world is broken up, we shall find that they all admit the benevolence of God, and the divine mission of his Son, the necessity of repentance and a holy life, and the certainty of salvation, if we believe and obey. So very few are the exceptions to this remark, that we may receive it as a general truth. But if Christians be agreed in the essentials, why should their disputes about the circumstances of religion operate to its disadvantage? Why should I neglect Christianity, or treat it with contempt, because some point, which may far exceed the human comprehension, cannot be cleared up to universal satisfaction?

BUT to give this plea (which is a very popular one) all its weight, I will suppose, that the most important doctrines of the gospel may have been the subject of controversy. What follows, that the gospel itself is unworthy of our regard? By no means. We only learn from this fact, the necessity of proving all things, and of embracing those opinions, which appear to be best supported. Instead of neglecting, this should be a motive with us to exercise our powers. And if a spirit of inquiry be accompanied with a good life, we shall know of every doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether it be merely a human invention.

BUT to proceed—As the disputes, so the practices of Christians have been alleged as an excuse for disregarding their religion. It has been urged, that their temper and lives are no better than those of other men. Instances of gross hypocrisy have been pointed out ;

out ; and all the wickedness of the dark ages has been produced as a standing witness against the christian name. But if professors of the gospel have walked unworthy of it, does that authorize a contempt, or neglect of the system itself ? So far from it, they who offer this excuse, should become the advocates for Christianity ; and should endeavour, by their own good example, to rescue it from contempt. They should display in their temper and lives the excellency of the institution. This would be far more rational than to despise religion, because it is sometimes wounded in the house of its friends.

AGAIN—Some decline an acquaintance with religion by the idle pretence, that it is not suited to their time of life. This has been the plea of young persons, when urged to take upon them the christian profession. But of all excuses, this is the most idle. Do they mean, that religion is of so gloomy a cast, that they must forego all the pleasures of life, should they become Christians ? This is not true : for no one rational enjoyment is interdicted by the gospel. Do they mean, that it is not so easy for young minds to be formed to the duties of sobriety, righteousness, and piety, as for others ? This is likewise a mistake. Before bad habits are contracted, the moral sensibility impaired, the conscience hardened, and a sense of shame overcome, the yoke of Christ is comparatively easy, and his burden light. The sooner we attend to religion, the easier will it be to acquire the virtues and graces, which constitute the Christian. Hence the morning of life should never be offered as an apology for estranging ourselves from God and our duty.

FINALLY—We ought not to persevere in our vices, upon the principle that we are too far advanced to reform.

reform. I am sensible, that it is a very uncommon thing for "a man (to use the words of Nicodemus) to be born when he is old." Bad habits strengthen with years. Conscience loses its influence, and religion its charms. Hence that remark of the prophet, "Can the *Æthiopian* change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may you do good, who have been accustomed to do evil."

BUT, though difficult, still a reformation may not be absolutely impossible, even for persons of this description. If brought to a sense of their true characters, they may, through that grace which is freely afforded, be renewed in the temper of their minds, may be delivered from the dominion of their passions, and enabled to walk in newness of life and new obedience. Human nature is confessedly weak. But we have a merciful parent, who will work in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. We ought not therefore too hastily to conclude, that we have advanced so far in the ways of wickedness, that we should vainly attempt to recover those of honour and virtue.

THESE remarks, I would charitably hope, will make a suitable impression on our minds. Ever since the fall of man, he has been disposed to frame excuses for his misconduct. To extenuate her guilt, the mother of the human kind urged the subtilty of the serpent; and her fatal influence was plead by the companion of her life as an apology for his transgression. The scribes and pharisees urged the poverty and meanness of our Saviour as a justification of their unbelief; and the multitude excused themselves by the inquiry, have any of the rulers believed on him? In the context, his lands, his stock, or a new connexion, was urged by an ingrateful guest as an apology

apology for his rudeness. And we have heard some of the excuses which are offered at the present day. But let us not affront the Supreme Being by any such idle pretences as some have framed, in order to give a plausibility to their undutiful behaviour. Let us not urge our doubts, when we are conscious that we have never examined the foundation which supports Christianity. Let us not plead our avocations, because such a plea is highly absurd. Let us not pretend that we are discouraged by the jarring opinions or inconsistent behaviour of those, who name the name of Jesus. Let us not attempt to persuade ourselves or others, that the day of salvation has passed, or that we want that steadiness and experience, which are pre-requisites to religion ; but inasmuch as we are invited to partake of the gospel-entertainment, let us close with the invitation. Let us thankfully receive those good things which the bounty of God has provided ; and let us remember, that a refusal on our part will argue the utmost baseness and depravity. The fate of those, to whom the text has a more immediate reference, was recorded for our admonition ; wherefore, let us beware lest we be involved in their condemnation. Should we imitate their example, the time will come when we shall justly suffer for having refused so great salvation.

Sermon III.

Habitual Devotion.



PSALM X. 4.

“GOD IS NOT IN ALL HIS THOUGHTS.”

IN these words, David is characterizing some bold transgressors, who disturbed his reign by their outrageous practices; and who wounded his feelings by their indecent reflections on God and religion. Among his subjects, such examples of human depravity were not uncommon. From his productions it appears, that many unprincipled persons disgraced the age in which he flourished. And we learn, from his complaints, that all his attempts to reclaim them were ineffectual.

THE psalm, from which I have taken the text, is written in a very serious strain. It begins with a solemn address to God, as the moral governor of the world, and the avenger of all injustice and impiety. “Why standest thou afar off, O Lord, why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?” He then proceeds to a description of the wicked; and he particularly observes, that *God is not in all their thoughts*. His meaning is, that they did not suffer themselves to reflect on his being, his presence, his moral government, their relation to him, as the rightful monarch of the universe, and their accountableness to him as a future judge. These were thoughts which they laboured to suppress. And they had recourse to

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such a measure in order that they might feel more comfortable in a course of wickedness.

As the same disposition prevails at the present day, the complaint, uttered by David, will furnish a proper subject for a religious discourse. I shall therefore consider, when the charge may be justly urged; point out the natural consequences of excluding a moral governor from all our thoughts, and recommend a different line of behaviour.

THAT the awful majesty of God should always possess our minds is not to be expected. The invariable contemplation of any one object (were it possible) would absolutely unfit us for the duties of life, and for the station in which we are placed. Whilst we continue in this world, we must experience many cares, and pursue many concerns of a merely temporal nature. We must make provision for our families; we must educate our children, and introduce them into life. The farmer must cultivate his lands. The merchant must attend to the objects of commerce. The mechanic must practise his art. The statesman must study the interests of his country, and concert measures for its security. The legislator must make laws, and the magistrate execute them. The judge must hear, and the advocate plead causes. The physician must attend to the duties of his humane office; and men of all professions must act in the line of their calling. There is such a thing as the business of life, and that business must be attended to.

BUT such attention would be impossible, were God, in the literal sense, in all our thoughts. Were his infinite and adorable majesty to be the sole object of our contemplation, the business of life would stand still. With such an awful image before us, we could

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not so far command our thoughts, as to attend to any thing but the excellencies of his nature. We should be dead to the world around us, and indifferent to all its concerns. The active powers of the mind would undergo a total relaxation; and the various duties, upon which the existence of society depends, would be altogether neglected.

IN all ages, there have been some enthusiasts, who have endeavoured to perfect their nature by divine contemplations. For this purpose they have retreated from the world; forsaken its pleasures; abandoned its cares; and taken up their melancholy abode, either with the beasts of the desert, or with persons of their own enthusiastick turn. But their zeal has never recommended them to the more enlightened part of mankind. From their contemplative lives religion has derived no credit, and human nature no honour. Nor have they themselves outstripped others in their advances towards perfection.

BUT such useless, such inactive beings should we all become, did our religion oblige us to exclude all thoughts, but those which terminate in God. As the faint rays, which proceed from the distant stars, are lost in the beams of the sun, so would all other ideas be swallowed up in those of the divinity. The blessings of life would be overlooked. Our country, our families, our friends, our liberty, and even our lives, would be regarded as objects of utter indifference. We should have no hearts to feel; no spirit to act. In short, our social nature would undergo an entire change, were we to call off the mind from all objects but the Supreme Being; and to abandon every pursuit, but the contemplation of his majesty.

IT is plain, then, that David does not condemn the wicked, because that God was not, in *this* sense, in all

all their thoughts. Far other was the ground of his complaint. His controversy with the licentious part of mankind arose from that habitual thoughtlessness of God, and contempt of his governing authority, which appeared in all their words and actions. He condemned them, because, so far from setting God always before them, they studiously endeavoured to banish him from their minds; because they never raised their eyes to him, either by way of gratitude or admiration; because they perversely endeavoured to keep out of view the perfections of his nature, his universal presence, his particular providence, his moral government, his righteous laws, his just expectations from the human kind, and the future account, which every one must give. Truths so opposite to their principles and practices, could not be welcome to the wicked. As objects of contemplation they could afford them no pleasure; and for this reason, these transgressors not only neglected to call them up, but treated them as intruders, whenever they found their way into their minds, or solicited their attention. This was the great impiety, against which the monarch protests in so many places; and to which he particularly alludes in the passage before us.

God is a being to whom we all stand in the most important relation: he is the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits: as he originally made, so he upholds us in being: he gives us all the good things which we enjoy; and he preserves us amid the numerous evils with which we are surrounded. Throughout universal nature he is always present: he is intimately acquainted with the state and employment of our minds; and he is a spectator of all the actions of our lives: he is our supreme governor; and as such, has signified his pleasure, and required obedience,

obedience. Finally, he is our judge ; and upon his righteous decision must depend our condition in the approaching state. Such is the great God, such his character, and such the mutual relation of him and his creatures.

How proper then is it that such a being should often employ our serious meditation ? Ought we not frequently to survey the perfections of his nature, and gratefully to remember our obligations to his goodness ? Ought not the mind to be in such a state, that the visible creation and the events of providence will readily awaken the idea of a God ? Though we cannot confine all our contemplations to him, yet is it not reasonable that we should cultivate a spirit of habitual devotion ? Surely, it is : and consequently the psalmist has justly condemned those, “ who have not God in all their thoughts.”

AND from this view of the subject, we may easily determine against what particular description of men the same charge may be now urged. They who seldom reflect on a power above ; they who do not trace the wisdom, power, and goodness of God in the works of nature, and dispensations of providence ; they who do not habitually keep in mind that God is a moral governor, and all men his subjects ; they, in one word, who do not employ their thoughts upon any of those objects or duties, which more immediately respect the most high, may be ranked among those practical atheists, which David, in the passage before us, meant to expose. They put the thoughts of God far from them ; and they desire not the knowledge of his ways.

I now proceed to point out the consequences of such impiety ; and by “ not having God in all our thoughts,” we lose a very powerful motive to practical

cal virtue. What does it avail, to argue that right and wrong have their foundation in nature? What avail the curious speculations of the learned respecting the essential difference and eternal fitness of things? How does it affect the great body of mankind, to tell them that there is a beauty in virtue, and a deformity in vice? We know that these speculations may amuse the understanding, but that they have very little influence over the heart. The case must be brought home to a man's conscience; and the idea of a law-giver must be introduced, in order to give force to the rules of morality.

BUT this stimulus to duty is lost to those who have not God in all their thoughts: they do not recollect his presence: they do not realize that his eyes are in every place, beholding both the evil and the good. Hence they allow themselves to take the most wanton liberties with his name: they presume to break those laws, which he has established for the good of his creatures: they venture to indulge those lusts and passions, which war against the soul; and they contract habits, which must subject them to infamy here, and ruin hereafter. Such are the consequences of keeping out of view the moral character and government of God.

COULD men be persuaded to set the Lord always before them, it is impossible that they should be inattentive to their duty. With God in their thoughts, they could not blaspheme him; with his image in their minds, they could not deliberately violate the truth, defraud their neighbours, oppress the weak, or do injustice to any man. Under the impression, that he is present with them, they could not indulge to sensual excesses. The immediate eye of a master is a great restraint upon an unworthy servant; and the presence

presence of a parent may have a good effect upon an ill-disposed child. If, therefore, we could realize that the eye of God is ever upon his creatures, that he now sees in secret, and will hereafter reward openly, we should, in all probability, be restrained from many vicious practices, and feel ourselves supported and animated to a course of duty.

To what danger, then, are all such exposed, as put the thoughts of God far from them, and choose to forget that any such being exists? They must be an easy prey to all manner of temptation. They are destitute of the best security against the sollicitations of the senses. Some, it is true, out of a mere regard to appearances, may abstain from the more dishonourable vices. Pride may prevent others from making themselves vile. The station, which some fill, or the business, which they pursue, may render it expedient that they should be tolerably circumspect in their behaviour. But I have now in contemplation the great body of mankind; and to restrain them from vice, and to keep steady to their duty, there must be something more powerful than these considerations. A sense of decency, pride, or prudence, will not effectually secure these ends.

How important, then, is the idea of a God? And how necessary that it should be in all our thoughts? What pains should we take in order to keep a supreme law-giver in view? How often should we remind ourselves, that wherever we are, he is present; and whatever we do, he is a witness? How diligently should we labour for right apprehensions of the relation in which we stand, and for a clear and habitual sense of our religious obligations? To such measures we should certainly have recourse, if aware of the temptations which are in the world, and duly concerned

cerned for our everlasting welfare. For so long as we set God before us, we shall be prepared for resistance ; and we shall rashly invite our own fall, when we dismiss him from our thoughts.

AGAIN—By losing sight of God, as the author of all things, and disposer of all events, we deprive ourselves of the best support in time of trouble. As the supreme Jehovah originally made, so he governs the world. Every event which takes place, is his wise appointment. It is he, who crowns us with mercies ; and who visits us with affliction. It is he, who kills and makes alive ; who wounds and heals. Our sufferings of every kind are not only known to him, but they take place according to a constitution of which he is the wise author ; and a system of government of which he is the head.

THIS being the true state of the case, how dark and confused must every thing appear to those who have not God in all their thoughts ? In adversity, they will never look beyond second causes : in time of great affliction, they will think only of their own sufferings : such pious reflections as fortify the virtuous, will never come to their aid : they will never derive consolation from these sublime truths ; that all nature is subject to the best of beings ; that the very hairs of our heads are numbered ; that he watches over us with the tender care of a parent ; that the troubles, which he brings upon us, are intended for our benefit ; and that all things shall work together for our good, if we submit to the course of events with a proper temper. Under the most pressing calamities, these suggestions will support the good man. Knowing that he suffers according to the will, and by the divine appointment of a righteous God, he

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will commit the keeping of his soul to him, in well-doing, as to a faithful creator.

WHAT folly, then, is chargeable on those, who deny themselves these consolations? By banishing the idea of a God, and an over-ruling providence, we do not place ourselves beyond the reach of affliction. The virtuous and the wicked stand exposed to the same troubles; and every man, in the course of life, will experience some of the evils which imbitter the present state. But men of habitual devotion comfort themselves with the thought, that the hand which afflicts, will graciously sustain them: whilst clouds and darkness will encompass those, who do not realize the agency of God, and advert to the infinite wisdom and equity of all his administrations. Exposed, then, as we all are, to trials, mortifications, losses, pains, and disappointments, how impolitic (to give it no worse name) is an habitual forgetfulness of God.

ONCE more—By excluding from our serious thoughts the greatest and best of beings, we deny ourselves one of the most exquisite positive pleasures, of which our nature is capable. What delight of sense can be compared with that, which results from the pious contemplation of so perfect a character? When we reflect, that there is a being, compared with whom, the universe is nothing in itself, nothing to us; when we contemplate this being in the engaging light of a father and benefactor; when, to use the words of a great moralist, we survey him “as the
“fountain of all power and jurisdiction, the cause of
“all causes, the disposer of the lots of all beings, the
“life and informing principle of all nature; from
“whose never-ceasing influence every thing derives
“its capacity of giving us pleasure, and in whom, as
“their source and centre, are united all the degrees
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“ of beauty and good, which we can observe in the “ creation ;” when our minds are occupied with such contemplations, do we not find the most exalted entertainment ? I appeal not to enthusiasts, but to men of sober reflection. I appeal to those, whose religion is rational, and whose devotion is not the offspring of ignorance, but of serious inquiry.

SUFFICIENT has now been said to expose the impiety in the text, and to convince men not only of its intrinsic evil, but its injurious consequences. It follows, then, that we cannot more effectually consult our present and everlasting interest, than by having God habitually in our thoughts. To the present age, even pure and rational piety appears in a forbidding light. It seems to be a general opinion, that if a man keeps his word, pays his debts, occasionally gives to the poor, and neither eats nor drinks to excess, he is as good as he need to be. But can any one reflect a moment, and not perceive that there are other duties, besides those of a social nature ? So far, indeed, as any man discharges the private and social duties, he is to be respected. It is an honour to any one to keep his word, perform his engagements, to pay his just debts, to relieve the miserable, to forgive his enemies, and to use the bounties of providence without abusing them. He who acts this part, acts worthily ; and ought to have the credit of his virtues ; but the point on which I insist is, that such a character is only partially good. To constitute an uniformly good man, there must be an habitual attention to those duties, which come under the general denomination of piety. We are indispensably bound to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul. We ought to feel grateful when we review his favours. His wisdom and power ought to excite our devout admiration.

tion. We should thankfully rejoice in his righteous government; and in all time of temptation and trouble, our minds should be continually directed towards God. These religious duties are as binding as those of justice and mercy. To neglect the former is as dishonourable as to neglect the latter. Nor is it less criminal to be impious than to be unjust.

I WOULD, therefore, earnestly recommend a rational, but habitual devotion. When I speak of devotion, I mean not the temporary fervours of the enthusiast. I mean not those sudden starts of religious passion, which are excited only at particular times, by particular persons, or on particular occasions. Many persons have their devout moments. At those seasons, their zeal borders on extravagance. At other times, their passions appear to be under no manner of control, and their levity is carried to a most criminal extreme. That devotion, only, which is temperate and habitual, is acceptable to God, and an honour to ourselves.

UNDER this conviction, let us endeavour to preserve an habitual remembrance of God. Let us continually set before us his being, his moral perfections, his government, his presence, and his laws. That the sentiments of love, reverence, and confidence may be kept alive in our bosoms, let us not restrain prayer. As often as our cares will admit, let us exercise the mind in serious meditation. Let us study the sacred oracles, particularly those parts, which are devotional and practical. And let us always keep in view the bright example of our blessed master. He ever expressed the most ardent love, the most profound reverence, the most unfeigned confidence, and the most cordial submission to the blessed God. As we are honoured with his name, let us cultivate his temper.

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Let the knowledge and love of the Deity be our distinguishing accomplishment : so shall we have within us a fruitful source of tranquillity and joy. As our devotion becomes habitual, we shall become wiser and better. In affliction, we shall have a divine support ; in temptation, a sure defence. Our virtue will stand on an immoveable foundation ; and when our flesh and strength fail us, God will be our strength and our portion forever.



Sermon IV.

The Clearness of Revelation.

DEUTERONOMY XXX. 11—14.

“FOR THIS COMMANDMENT, WHICH I COMMAND THEE THIS DAY, IS NOT HIDDEN FROM THEE, NEITHER IS IT FAR OFF : IT IS NOT IN HEAVEN, THAT THOU SHOULDEST SAY, WHO SHALL GO UP FOR US TO HEAVEN, AND BRING IT UNTO US, THAT WE MAY HEAR IT, AND DO IT ? NEITHER IS IT BEYOND THE SEA, THAT THOU SHOULDEST SAY, WHO SHALL GO OVER THE SEA FOR US, AND BRING IT UNTO US, THAT WE MAY HEAR IT, AND DO IT ? BUT THE WORD IS VERY NIGH UNTO THEE, IN THY MOUTH, AND IN THY HEART, THAT THOU MAYEST DO IT.”

ONE of the most plausible objections against the Jewish and Christian revelations, is the pretended obscurity of that volume, in which those revelations are preserved. It is asserted, that the scriptures

scriptures are hard to be understood ; that such as profess to believe them, are greatly divided in sentiment ; that opposite doctrines are grounded on the same passages ; and that, after the most laborious investigation, many impartial inquirers after divine truth have been under the mortifying necessity of acknowledging their ignorance, and of abandoning the pursuit not merely in disappointment, but in despair. To give weight to these assertions, the various sects, into which the religious world is divided, have been brought into view. And to confound its advocates and defenders, the question has been artfully proposed, whether an obscure revelation is not a contradiction in terms !

THAT these confident assertions are not less unfriendly to the divine authority, than to the efficacy of the inspired volume, will not be disputed. If it could be proved that the holy scriptures are absolutely unintelligible, it would be very preposterous to ascribe them to God. To pretend that the wise and merciful parent of mankind gave them rules, which they could neither comprehend nor apply, would be a most impious reflection on his character. That the mistakes and perplexities, the doubts and difficulties of his creatures should furnish any entertainment to the divine mind, is an insinuation that every one present will reject with horror.

NOR is there the smallest ground for such a reflection on the blessed God. In that volume, which believers regard as the repository of his will, and their duty, there is nothing, which can create the lowest suspicion, that it did not proceed from him. As a rule of action, the revelation communicated by Moses, was as clear and explicit, as a Jew could reasonably desire. When the heathens consulted their oracles,

oracles, the answer was returned in dark and ambiguous terms. But Moses could say, "this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

In this chapter, the Jewish law-giver undertakes to show the great advantages of unfeigned repentance, and a thorough reformation. He tells the listening multitude, that if at any time dispersed among other nations as a punishment of their sins, a return to duty would procure a return to their own land. In the most affecting language, he describes the divine compassion; and he draws the most delightful scene, if it should be their happiness to feel the obligations, and to discharge the duties of religion. "The Lord, says he, will rejoice over thee for good, if thou shalt hearken unto his voice, to keep his commandments, and his statutes, which are written in this book of the law; if thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul."

THE words follow, which introduce the discourse, in which the clearness of the preceptive part of the Jewish religion is strongly asserted. As to their duty to God and man, Moses declares, that the people of Israel could not plead that it had been hidden from them. They could not reasonably or decently desire, that any one should apply to heaven for new discoveries of the divine will. It was the practice of the ancient sages to visit distant countries, in order to gain

gain religious information ; but the people of God were not subjected to such an inconvenience. Their rule of action was not beyond sea ; but in that sacred volume which was dictated by inspiration, and continually recited in their ears. The science of religion was brought home to them : for which reason, the conscience of an immoral Jew would have reproached him, if, in any instance where duty was concerned, he had presumed to plead ignorance. A disciple of Moses might be astonished at many things recorded in his book. The history of his nation might acquaint him with events, which were extraordinary in themselves, and mysterious in some particular circumstances. But the point for which I contend, is this, that every Jew, of common capacity, might know how he ought to behave towards God and man ; and that he had a sufficient security against all fatal errors, in that word which was in his mouth, and in his heart.

To vindicate the observation of Moses, as an application to his own people, was not, however, my object in the choice of this subject. The words have been quoted by an inspired apostle ; and who will say, that they are not as descriptive of the essentials of the gospel, as of the weightier matters of the law ? Can a Christian declare, in the uprightness of his heart, that to be a good man, he must have a new revelation of his duty ? Will any one say, “ who shall ascend to heaven, to bring Christ down from above,” that he may explain his own precepts ; and show us what we must do to be saved ? Respecting many things recorded in the history of our Saviour, we might, indeed, be gratified with more ample information. But as to those things which are honest, pure, lovely, and of good report ; those things which
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render this life happy, and a future life certain ; how can they be more clearly expressed than in the sacred oracles ? What new light can be thrown upon the temper, which we ought to cultivate ; or the actions, which we should perform, in order to be qualified for the kingdom of heaven ?

MANY false reasonings on this subject may be traced up to a mistaken application of the word *revelation*. This term is applied to that whole collection of writings, of which the sacred volume is composed. But every thing contained in the page of scripture is not a matter of revelation. Some of the inspired books are historical ; others, devotional ; others, again, prophetic. In some, we find errors refuted, and vices reprov'd ; in others, doctrines delivered, and duties prescribed. Thus various are the component parts of that volume, which, by way of distinction, we call the Bible. In a compilation so ancient, and the materials of which are so diverse, may there not, then, be some obscure passages, whilst it be undeniable that every thing pertaining to life and godliness is written as with a sun-beam ?

WHEN we observe the course of events in this world, we are compelled to say with the apostle, "how unsearchable are the judgments of God, and his ways past finding out !" Why, then, should we be disappointed, if the record of past events should not, in all places, be level to our understanding ? If we cannot comprehend all things in the book of providence, can we suppose that a faithful transcript of that book will be perfectly intelligible ? Surely, our own observations on the divine government, as far as it is exercised on present objects, ought to prepare us to encounter difficulties in the history of earlier dispensations.

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BUT, if obscurity might be expected in some of the historical books of scripture, how much more in the prophetick? You must be sensible, that a clear view of futurity would unfit us for the present state of discipline. The measures employed by infinite wisdom, to prepare us for a nobler state of existence, would lose their efficacy, if we could foresee every thing which will come to pass. This being the case, we have only dark intimations of future events, in order that when they do take place, we may be impressed with the foreknowledge of God, and convinced of his over-ruling providence. Our Saviour has stated this point with sufficient clearness. "These things, says he, have I told you before they come to pass, that when they shall come to pass, ye may know that I am he." From this observation of our divine instructor, we may infer the true design of prophecy: it is not to give us a clear idea of things to come, but when predictions are actually accomplished, to confirm our faith in an almighty and perfectly wise disposer. From the nature of the thing, there must then be mysteries in the prophetick parts of the scripture.

NOR is it strange, that letters, directed to particular persons, and written on particular occasions, should, in some places, perplex the christian reader. We must be perfectly acquainted with all circumstances, in order to understand such letters. Hence the obscurity in many epistles ascribed to St. Paul. It is a remark even of a contemporary and fellow-apostle, that they "contain things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." The difficulties, which the first Christians experienced, have not decreased with length

of time. But many points advanced by the great apostle ; many arguments introduced into his writings ; many reproofs administered by him, many counsels, and many allusions, are involved in some degree of obscurity, because we cannot go back to his age, and change places with those to whom his epistles were more immediately addressed.

BUT what follows from this concession, that the apostle must come down from heaven to explain his writing ? by no means. Notwithstanding their partial obscurity, they are sufficiently clear for all the purposes of our moral improvement. Yes, even admitting the observation of St. Peter, "they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness." And by a diligent application to them, "the man of God will be furnished to every good work." Articles in the scripture history may be dark and perplexing ; predictions may be, in some respects, obscure ; the visions of the prophets may be mysterious in our eyes ; and even the reasonings of an apostle may not, in concerns of secondary importance, be brought down to our perfect comprehension ; and yet the way of duty may be so plain that the most simple need not mistake it. We read of secret things which belong to God ; and of things revealed for the direction of man. Of the latter description, are the rules of good living contained in the gospel. These are expressed in the plainest terms, and enforced by the strongest motives. If the inquiry turn upon principles and actions, which may be denominated essentials of religion, the answer must be, "the word is nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart."

THE character of God, and that part of our duty which more immediately respects him, how admirably

bly is the one drawn in the volume of revelation, and how plainly is the other inculcated? What can be more intelligible, than the testimony of Christ to the being and perfections of his heavenly father? How clearly do we perceive from his discourses, and those of his apostles, that God is infinitely powerful, wise, and good; that he is the constant friend of his creatures, and that he rejoices in their happiness? His compassion also, how clearly is it ascertained? And as to the efficacy of repentance, and the conditions on which we may hope for pardon and salvation, is a new revelation necessary to illustrate these interesting doctrines? It cannot indeed be denied, that if we aspire to find out the Almighty to perfection, we must be disappointed. But if we ask what God is, confining the inquiry to his proper character, as our maker, preserver, governor, and judge, the sacred oracles will furnish a satisfactory answer. He, who has no pretensions to any thing more than common sense, may learn from those oracles his relation to God, and the duties resulting from that relation. He may easily perceive, that love, reverence, gratitude, and submission, are indispensable. Without a new instructor from heaven, he will know that he ought to do homage to his maker. And that every act of worship should be performed in sincerity and truth, he will conclude without any special illumination. The Christian, who possesses a fair and honest mind, will be easily directed by the word of God to the various duties and offices of piety. He will complain of no mystery, when taught to bestow his best affections on the author of all good; to repose his confidence on one who can do no wrong; to express his wants to one who is ever disposed to hear; and to

to ascribe blessing and praise to one who is possessed of every perfection.

NOR will he meet with any difficulty in ascertaining his duty to his fellow-men. Who does not know, that whilst he loves God with all his heart, he must love his neighbour as himself? What can be more explicit than the laws of Christianity, relative to justice, mercy, fidelity, the forgiveness of injuries, and the exercise of benevolence? In the common intercourse of life, and the prosecution of our lawful concerns, can we reasonably ask that Christ should descend from above to explain the laws of truth and equity? Is not the word nigh unto us, in our mouth, and in our heart, "that whatsoever we would that others should do to us, we must do even so to them?"

THERE are, it must be confessed, many violations of this excellent rule. In society, many falsehoods are uttered; many hurtful passions are indulged; many wrongs are committed; and much good is withheld from those to whom it is due. But the false, the dishonest, and unfeeling, cannot take refuge in the obscurity of scripture. The just cause of complaint will be found not in the sacred volume, but in themselves. A protestant, and more especially one who is capable of reading the sacred books, will have a clear discernment of all the social duties. If, therefore, he be not an honest man, a man of veracity, and a man of benevolence, his understanding will be less in fault than his heart.

AND equally clear is the word of God in regard to those duties, which more immediately respect ourselves. Self-government is taught with the utmost plainness in the gospel. Purity, humility, temperance, and other virtues, which have less influence on society, than on our own happiness, are inculcated in terms,

terms, which need no comment : for which reason, an offender must stand convicted at the bar of his own conscience. Ignorance he cannot plead ; because he must be convinced that fleshly lusts war against the soul, and that these lusts are pointed out in the gospel as the scandal of human nature ; and a just ground of the righteous displeasure of God against the children of disobedience.

FINALLY—As our duty in its various branches, so our future destination, and the condition, on which we may hope to be happy hereafter, are brought into full view by the Son of God. The glories of our Saviour, which he had with the Father before the world was, have, during many centuries, been a subject of dispute. But, as to the respect and gratitude which are due to him ; as to our obligation to copy his temper, and to imitate his actions ; and to look for salvation through his mediation, there our information is ample. We have no difficulty, either in comprehending or applying that great christian principle, namely, that we should forgive as he forgave ; should do good continually, as he did ; and should walk as he walked. The doctrine of a resurrection from the grave is likewise as plain as it is momentous. And who can read the christian scriptures without perceiving, that a day is appointed, in which God will judge the world in righteousness ; and will render to every one as his works have been ? Can any one entertain a doubt, that faith in the religion of Jesus, repentance, and obedience, will be followed with life eternal ? And, with the sacred pages before him, can any one flatter himself with the thought, that he shall escape the wrath to come, if he hold the truth in unrighteousness ? Is a state of retribution beyond the grave a matter of conjecture ?

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So far from it, are not life and death set before us ; and could we be more convinced than we now are, that our habits and actions will be a source of future joy or sorrow, even if one were to come down from heaven to republish this doctrine ? Most assuredly, our duty here, and our condition hereafter, are taught in so many parts of the sacred volume, and in terms so explicit, that we are absolutely without excuse, if disobedient to God, and thoughtless of futurity.

It follows, then, from the subject of this discourse, that we, who enjoy the light of divine revelation, ought to be unfeignedly thankful for this inestimable blessing. What a privilege is it to have the things, which belong to our peace, set before our eyes ? What a satisfaction must it be to an inquisitive mind, to know what the will of God is ; and what future blessings are connected with obedience ? How many have desired to see the things which we see, and to hear the truths which we hear, but have not been gratified ? The word, as far as our moral improvement and our highest interests are concerned, being nigh unto us, let our hearts overflow with gratitude to the God of heaven ; and let it appear by our actions, that we do not undervalue the greatest of all blessings.

The subject of this discourse is likewise an admonition to those, who complain of the sacred volume as above their comprehension. One serious question may be proposed, do you observe those rules, and practise those duties, which you profess to understand ? That first great commandment, to “love God with all your heart,” and the second, which is like to it, to “love your neighbour as yourself,” do they command your obedience ? Do you submit to the authority of Christ, where it is indisputable ? And
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though it does not clearly appear what you shall be, yet do you now endeavour to be like the Son of God, that when he shall appear, you may appear with him in glory? Do you follow the plain rules which are exhibited in the gospel; as far as you comprehend the will of God, do you endeavour to conform to it; so will you know of the doctrine, whether it be human or divine. Obedience will make every thing plain; and you will find your way to heaven, though Christ should not in person come down to instruct you; and you will be persuaded, though one should not arise from the dead.

Sermon V.

Christ, the Light of the World.

JOHN VIII. 12.

"THEN SPAKE JESUS AGAIN UNTO THEM, SAYING, I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD: HE THAT FOLLOWETH ME, SHALL NOT WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT SHALL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE."

WHEN our Lord uttered these words, he was in the temple; and it was early in the morning. His design in repairing to that sacred place, was not merely to do homage to his heavenly father, but to dispense instruction to a listening multitude. Accordingly, when the people had convened, he sat down and taught them. But scarcely were his lessons

sons begun, before they were interrupted by one of the insidious arts, to which his enemies had recourse to ensnare him. They brought to him a woman taken in adultery, to see whether he would acquit or condemn her. But he, with that consummate prudence, which marked his character, refused to decide: and he dismissed the subject in a manner, which confounded his enemies, and gave an absolute defeat to their wicked machinations.

By this time, we may suppose, the sun began to appear; and pouring in its beams into the temple, it suggested to our Saviour the beautiful metaphor, under which he represents himself and his doctrine. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." How happy this allusion to the orb of day, to its effects on visible objects, and to its subserviency to the pleasure and convenience of man! From the sun in the east, how natural the transition to the sun of righteousness! And whilst the former was irradiating the temple with his beams, how pleasing the reflection, that the latter was adorning it with his presence, and dispelling the moral darkness, which had overspread the world! If the hearers attended to the circumstances, which suggested the remark, they must have been delighted with its pertinence.

BUT to return—"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." My design, in this discourse, is to give these words a particular consideration.

FIRST—Our Saviour speaks of himself as "the light of the world": and admitting his office, as a religious instructor, we cannot but acknowledge the justness of the figure. As a light, he was predicted

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by the ancient prophets. And when Simeon took the infant Saviour in his arms, he pronounced him "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel." But why need I multiply testimonies, in a case, which speaks for itself? Our Lord evidently came, as well to instruct, as to die for mankind. He came to correct their errors, to cure their prejudices, to rectify their mistakes, and to make them wise to salvation: and the instructions, which he uttered when on earth, and which he left behind, when he ascended to heaven, are admirably fitted to accomplish this end. They reveal to us the character, perfections, and government of God, and his design in the creation of moral intelligent beings. They discover to us our own character, our duty, and future destination. They impart to us the means and conditions of our reconciliation with God. They bring life and immortality to light; and they prescribe a line of conduct, which cannot fail of leading to glory and happiness.

THE divine lessons of our blessed Saviour being thus instructive, how justly is he characterized as a light? With what propriety is he styled the sun of righteousness? And how great reason have we to rejoice, who are visited with his beams? When the natural sun appears in the east, the smaller lights become invisible, and even those of superior splendor are lost in his rays. So when the Son of God came into the world, the prophets, which preceded him, were no longer the glory of human nature; the dignity of their character was eclipsed by the majesty of his; and their instructions were lost in the gospel. When the sun appears, and begins his celestial course, the damps of night are dispelled, and the children of men rejoice in his presence. So when the day-spring

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from on high dawned upon mankind, their doubts and fears were removed; and a ray of hope cheered their disconsolate state. When the sun appears, the objects around us become visible; and we are able to pursue our ordinary business or pleasures. Alike beneficial is his presence, who is styled the light of the world. It has brought to view the moral perfections of the supreme Jehovah; it has displayed the nature and measures of his government; led us to see the worship, which he expects; the duty, which he requires; the Saviour, which he has provided; and the everlasting blessings, which will crown our obedience. These points had long bewildered the more inquisitive of the human kind. But that information, which philosophy refused, is imparted by the gospel. The man of God is now thoroughly furnished unto every good work. He knows the relations, in which he stands; and the duties, which result from them. St. Paul saith, "whatsoever doth make manifest is light." Our Saviour then, is not merely a true, but a most glorious light, if he has manifested those things, which essentially concern our conduct here, and our condition hereafter.

BUT further—He is "the light of the world." The Jews flattered themselves, that the benevolence of God was restricted to their nation. They could not conceive, that those, who were strangers to their commonwealth, could have any thing to hope from the divine compassion. But our Saviour did not suffer them to labour under this mistake: he let them know, that his instructions would not be confined to the narrow limits of Judea. Among other intimations to that purpose, is that in the text. Proclaiming himself the light of the world, he proclaimed glad tidings to all people. Whilst he mortified the
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pride of the Jews, he revived the hopes of the Gentiles: and after his resurrection, those hopes were verified by the pious labours of the apostles. They went out into all the world, and preached the gospel to every creature. There was no speech or language, where their voice was not heard. Considering then, the communications of divine knowledge, which were made by Jesus Christ in person, or by those who were commissioned by him, we must regard him as the light of the world. As all parts of the earth are, in turn, irradiated by the natural sun, so were all nations in succession illuminated by the gospel.

BUT from the terms, in which the Son of God characterizes himself, I proceed, secondly, to the solemn truth, which our Lord had a more particular view to inculcate: and that is, that whosoever should "follow him would not walk in darkness." To follow Christ, is, in plain language, to be a Christian. It is, to yield an unfeigned assent to the religion of our heavenly master; to believe his doctrines with our whole hearts; and to believe on rational grounds. It is, moreover, to make a public profession of our faith. It likewise implies the imitation of his example; and the most earnest endeavours to walk conformably to the gospel. Less than this cannot constitute a follower of Jesus Christ. If we examine how this term is generally used in the sacred pages, we shall not disapprove of this construction.

To "walk in darkness" must intend, to be in a state of ignorance, error, and wickedness; to be distressed with doubts and fears; to be in that uncomfortable state, which arises from a sense of guilt, and the alarming apprehension of its future consequences. This was the miserable condition of many, before the publication of the gospel. And if they allowed themselves

selves to reflect, it would be the portion of all, who, whilst they own the gospel in words, disown it by their behaviour. Persons who offer such violence to reason, conscience, and revelation, must walk in darkness, unless they are absolutely past reflection.

It is true, some good men have discouraging moments. Though followers of Jesus Christ, they do not have all the comforts, which his religion is calculated to impart. Their prospects are sometimes bright, at other times clouded. Sometimes, their hopes, at other times, their fears, prevail. Now, the doors of heaven appear to be unfolded to them; and now, forever closed. Such is the melancholy state of some, to whom we should do great injustice, did we not acknowledge the sincerity of their religious professions, and the excellency of their christian character.

BUT what general observation has not its exceptions? The ways of wisdom are generally ways of pleasantness; yet there are extraordinary times, when a man's religion may prove his temporal ruin. Innocence and meekness are a probable security against wrong; yet there are times, when they may invite it. Godliness is said to have the promise of the life which now is; yet it may so happen, that of all men the Christian may be most miserable. But extraordinary cases do not invalidate a general observation. Though, in times of persecution, a Christian may suffer for his religion; yet it will generally be a source of enjoyment. And though a follower of Jesus Christ may not walk in perfect light; yet the exceptions to the observation in the text will be comparatively few. Generally speaking, "light is sown for the righteous; and gladness for the upright in heart."

AND where the comforts of religion do not follow
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its moral influence, it is easy to account for the fact. The gloom, which overspreads the mind of a Christian, may be traced up to a very natural cause. Sometimes, it arises from errors incorporated with the truths of the gospel; at other times, it may be ascribed to habit of body, and constitutional infirmity. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; and it is very conceivable, that the peculiar state of the body may brighten or obscure our future prospects. But where this cause does not operate, wrong ideas of religion, and superstitious errors mingled with it, will sufficiently account for the doubts and fears, which sometimes exercise the Christian.

HAVING stated this exception, I now return to the words of our blessed Saviour: "He that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness." A sincere and rational Christian will probably find the highest satisfaction in the part, which he has chosen. If a state of sin, of doubts, of ignorance, of error, of fear, of remorse, be a state of darkness, he will be far removed from that forlorn state. Most certainly, he will not walk in the darkness of sin. This is implied in the very definition of a Christian. To be a Christian is to be a pattern of piety, and an example of evangelical obedience. It would therefore, be a loss of time, to labour the point, that darkness, if, by this word, we understand moral evil, will not obscure his path, whom the Son of God would own to be a disciple and follower. So far from it, as the wise man has observed, "the path of the just, like the shining light, shines more and more unto the perfect day."

AGAIN—The follower of Jesus Christ will not walk in the darkness of ignorance and error. This is the darkness, which overspread the heathen world, at the time of our Lord's appearance. And in this darkness
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a great part of the human kind are still involved. But he, who understands and assents to the gospel, is rescued from this uncomfortable state. The great concerns of futurity are disclosed to him ; and his duty, in all its more important branches, is sufficiently explained. Had we not been divinely instructed, we should have been without God, and without hope. We should have been ignorant of the being who formed us, of the homage due to him, and of the end, for which we were brought into existence. We should probably have fallen into the grossest mistakes, respecting the line of conduct becoming our character ; and all the idle and absurd fictions of heathenism would have formed our religious creed. I have no reason to conclude that our opinions would have been wiser, our errors fewer, or our practices better, than those of other persons, to whom providence has denied the benefit of the gospel.

How certain then, is it, that the rational Christian is not in darkness ! His information, so far as respects his duty, is adequate to all the purposes of life and godliness. He is brought to the knowledge of God ; has clear intimations of a future state, and has learned upon what terms its blessedness may be secured. His errors will not be of such a nature, as to endanger his future well-being. Knowing the God, who made him ; the rules prescribed him ; the happiness provided for him ; and the measures in operation to bring him to glory, he may be justly denominated a child of light, and of the day.

To proceed—If by darkness we understand doubts and fears, the rational Christian is not involved in that darkness. The gospel has cleared up all his difficulties respecting a great first cause, the perfections, and more especially, the benevolence of his nature,
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his compassion towards the miserable, and mercy to the penitent, the consequences of death, and the future condition of the virtuous. Such an enlightened follower of the blessed Jesus has no doubt of a resurrection from the grave, and a glorious immortality. He has no fearful apprehensions of the divine displeasure, if penitent and obedient. He does not despair of the final approbation of his judge, because his works have not hitherto been perfect. But convinced of the divine complacency, he trusts, that he, who made him, will have mercy on him. With these honourable ideas of God, he is led to love him supremely. And in him is verified that observation of the apostle, that "perfect love casteth out fear."

FINALLY—The Christian shall not walk in darkness, if by that expression we understand a state of remorse. In following the Saviour, a good life is necessarily included. But what reason has he to reproach himself, whose conversation is according to the gospel? No man, it is true, has so conducted, as to review his behaviour with entire approbation. But there is a vast distance between the remembrance of past follies, and the consciousness of present guilt. That regret, which arises from the former, may abate our joys, but cannot deprive us of the comforts of religion. The assurance, that if we repent of our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, will support us under those reflections, which will sometimes find their way to our minds. But remorse is misery in the extreme. The spirit of a man may sustain him under the remembrance of infirmities, for which he has humbled himself before God; but the scourges of an unapproving conscience, who can bear? If any human being may be represented as involved in thick darkness, it is he who feels these self-reproaches.

reproaches. In his view, the sun has no splendor ; and nature displays no charms. There is no flavour in his wine, nor does it give cheerfulness to his heart. He goes about seeking rest, and finding none. When he says, " my bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint ;" then can he adopt the complaint of Job : " Thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me with visions ; so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than life." So dark and disconsolate is his condition, who is at variance with his conscience, and who feels the keen reproaches of that monitor. But the follower of Jesus Christ is a stranger to these miseries, as he is a stranger to the vices from which they proceed. It is his privilege to be delivered from darkness, and to enjoy the light of life.

By this mode of expression, we are to understand the highest degree of enjoyment, of which the present life is capable. The man of religion will find the good part, which he has chosen, a source of exquisite pleasure. He will not only be free from doubts and fears, from ignorance and mistakes, from the accusations of conscience, and the apprehensions of future misery, but he will be positively happy. He will walk in the light ; his path before him will be plain ; and it will conduct him to that celestial abode, which the prophet has described in these beautiful strains : " And there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign forever and ever."

THE subject of this discourse reminds us of our privileges as Christians ; and leads us to reflect with gratitude on that goodness which has so distinguished us from others of the human kind. How highly are

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we favoured, to have the best instructions and best example, the best motives, and the noblest encouragements to love and obey our maker? What a privilege to be brought to the knowledge of the true God? What a happiness to know that death is not destruction, that the grave is the place of our repose, and not our eternal home; that we shall rise again at the last day, and that pleasures, which exceed all description, will reward our obedience? What a singular favour to be apprized of the character and office of Jesus Christ, and the great salvation purchased by his blood! It may, it ought to be our language, "Blessed are our eyes, for they see; and our ears, for they hear." For it is a fact, that kings and prophets desired the instructions and discoveries of our religion, but desired them in vain. The mystery hid from them is now revealed to us. And we have a clear view of those things, which, to the wise and prudent of former times, were subjects of mere conjecture.

AND ought not such spiritual blessings to excite our utmost gratitude to their author? Ought we not to prize them above every earthly good? Ought they not to employ our private meditation, and public praises? When we attempt to review the many favours bestowed upon us by our munificent benefactor, ought we not to dwell with supreme pleasure on that gospel, which has banished our doubts, revived our hopes, dispelled our ignorance, rectified our mistakes, and poured in such divine light on the human mind? Surely, our gratitude should be in proportion to the benefit received; and if so, our thankful acknowledgments will be daily rendered to him, who hath called us from darkness to his marvellous light.

BUT to reap the future benefits of this dispensation,

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something more is necessary, than mere expressions of gratitude. To obtain the light of life, we must walk as children of the light, and have no concern with the unprofitable works of darkness. Actions, which would be excused in a heathen, will not be pardoned in us. Having the clearest representation of our duty, and the strongest motives to practise it, our immoralities will subject us to the utmost displeasure of the great God. In the decisions of a future day, our advantages and improvements will be righteously compared; and if it shall then appear, that we have offended against the clearest light, we shall be beaten with many stripes.

To avert the divine resentment, let us therefore render that return, which our privileges require. In point of religious advantages, we are raised up to heaven. Then let our virtues exalt our character; and qualify us for the happiness of that blessed abode. If we are followers of Jesus Christ, this end will be secured. A life conformable to his gospel, the cultivation of his temper, and the imitation of his example, cannot fail to render us happy. If we thus resemble the author of our salvation, no darkness will bewilder our steps, or cloud our prospects. In time of trouble, we shall have a support, which the world knows not of. Amid confusion, we shall have the peace of God, which passeth all understanding. A ray of light will cheer the valley of the shadow of death; and when our exalted Redeemer shall revisit this world, he will conduct us to a city, which will have no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine into it: inasmuch as the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb will be the light thereof.



Sermon

Sermon VI.

Blessedness of those, who have not seen,
and yet have believed.

JOHN XX. 29.

“BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND
YET HAVE BELIEVED.”

THE occasion of these words was the incredulity of the apostle Thomas, when first informed of the resurrection of his Lord. Being absent, when Christ made his appearance to the other disciples, he knew not that he had risen again, till they assured him, they were eye-witnesses of the fact. But, however good he might esteem their authority in other cases; in the present, Thomas did not think it a sufficient ground for his faith. The resurrection of Jesus was a point of too much importance, to believe even upon *their* report. To remove all doubts, and give entire satisfaction to *his* mind, he must have the evidence of his own senses. Accordingly, he replied, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into it, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

THIS was a very unreasonable demand; and to punish him for it, our Lord might justly have left him in that perplexity of mind, which his incredulity must have occasioned. But in condescension to his weakness, and to answer other wise purposes, he appeared again to the disciples; and took an opportunity to do it, when Thomas was present. Throwing

ing open the doors, in a sudden and unexpected manner, and shutting them in a moment, "Jesus stood in the midst, and said, peace be unto you." Then turning to Thomas, he said, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing." Overcome by the condescension of his Lord, and the ocular demonstration he now had of his resurrection, he brake forth in a transport of joy and astonishment, "My Lord, and my God." "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed: *blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*" Upon these words, an ingenious * commentator makes this remark: "If it be queried, why a greater blessedness is pronounced on those, who believe on more slender evidence, it may be answered, that our Lord by no means intended to assert, that every one, who believes without seeing, is happier than any one believing on sight; for then the meanest Christian now would be more happy than the greatest apostle: but only, that where the effects of that faith were equal, it argued greater simplicity, candor, and wisdom, to yield to evidence without seeing, than could be argued merely from having believed on sight, after sufficient evidence of another kind had been proposed. It was therefore, in effect, telling Thomas, "It would have been more acceptable to him, if he had not stood out so long." And it was doing it in such a manner, as would be most calculated for the comfort and encouragement of believers in future ages, to whom, in many of his speeches to the apostles themselves, our Lord expresses a most obliging and affectionate regard."

THIS comment, and indeed the whole story of Thomas, shew how greatly these words of our blessed

* Dr. Doddridge.

Saviour

Saviour have been misunderstood. I need not inform you, that they have often been pressed into the service of religious tyranny ; and been produced to countenance and support the worst extravagances of enthusiastic folly. I need not insist upon the many strange, unaccountable doctrines, which have been built upon them. The religious history of mankind will show, that they have been the means of setting reason and faith at variance with each other ; and that artful men have availed themselves of them, in order to humble common sense, and subdue a spirit of free inquiry. But how unjustly they have been prostituted to these purposes, if not apparent from their connexion, and the observations already made, yet, I trust, will sufficiently appear from farther examination. To illustrate their meaning, and improve it, shall be the business of this discourse.

AND first—I would observe, it was not the intention of our Saviour to depreciate that faith, which was built on sensible evidence, or absolutely to deny the merit of it. The apostles and primitive Christians believed on the Son of God, in consequence of what they saw with their eyes, heard with their ears, and their hands handled. They had ocular demonstration of his divine power and authority. They saw him heal the sick, restore the weak, open the eyes of the blind, unlock the deaf ear, cast out devils, raise the dead, and do many wonderful works. They, who attended on his person, were eye-witnesses of these things ; and shall we say there was no merit in their faith ? Did it reflect no honour upon their character, that they were open to conviction ; that they rejected the prejudices of education, and embraced the gospel, because they *saw* it confirmed by signs and wonders, and gifts of the holy spirit ? Was
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a belief grounded upon such evidence, no mark either of wisdom, simplicity, or candor? Certainly we cannot suppose any such thing, if we consider the nature of evidence, and the peculiar circumstances of those first Christians. It is true, they heard with their ears the heavenly discourses of our divine Lord: it is equally true, they saw with their eyes the miracles, wonders and signs, which God almighty did by him, for the conviction of his people: and it is no less certain, that their hands handled the word of life: still their faith was not the effect of absolute necessity; nor was conviction so poured in upon their minds, that they could not possibly resist it. Others saw the wonders which Christ performed, without being convinced of his divine character. Some who were present, when he raised Lazarus from the dead, did not believe on him, but went away and accused him to the pharisees. And it is particularly mentioned, when these proud hypocrites saw a man whom Jesus had restored to sight, instead of revering his authority, and admitting his pretensions as the true Messiah, they only took occasion to insult him. In believing, however some may represent it, the mind is not entirely passive. Our passions, our prejudices, our private interest, may have a great influence over our faith. If a truth be proposed to us, which is perfectly agreeable to our wishes, we can believe it upon the slightest evidence: and we can reject a disagreeable truth upon evidence, that is much stronger. Hence the infidelity of the pharisees, and many other Jews, notwithstanding Jesus Christ did among them such works, as none other man ever did, or could do, unless God were with him. They were unconvinced, because they did not choose to believe on the Son of God. They were jealous of his growing fame; they
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perceived his religion would be fatal to their influence and popularity ; and therefore they pronounced him an impostor, though declared to be the Son of God with power. Pride, avarice, and ambition interposed between them and the truth ; obscured the evidence with which it was attended ; depraved their hearts ; darkened their understandings, and blinded them to all miraculous exertions ; the most rational, and the only means, which infinite wisdom could employ for their conviction !

NOT so the humble followers of the blessed Jesus. They believed him to be the appointed Saviour of the world, because of the wonders which he performed. They concluded, no man could do such miracles, unless God was with him ; therefore they professed themselves his followers, and embraced his religion : they cheerfully sacrificed the prejudices of their education ; with candor they listened to his heavenly discourses ; they received the truth in the love of it ; and notwithstanding the calamities it exposed them to, they made it the business of their lives to spread this truth over the whole world ; and they actually died in attestation of it. And is there no dignity in such conduct, no value in that principle of faith by which it was inspired ? Does the strength of evidence destroy the merit of their believing ? And are they less blessed, merely from this circumstance, that the proofs of our Lord's mission were objects of their sight ? by no means. The apostles and primitive Christians acted a noble part, in yielding to that evidence, which was offered to them. Their faith will be a swift witness against the unbelieving Jews, and a lasting monument of their own simplicity and candor.

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AGAIN, secondly—When our Lord says, *bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed*, he does not mean that our faith ſhould be without any rational foundation. I mention this, becauſe ſome enthuſiaſts would draw this concluſion from the words of the text. And indeed, extravagant as this opinion may be, it has the countenance of ſome very ancient fathers of the church, and others, who adorn religion by their lives, however they may injure it by their ſentiments. But ſurely, if we give the matter a ſerious examination, we ſhall perceive that nothing could be more abſurd and prepoſterous, than to pretend to believe a doctrine, for which we have no kind of evidence. God never exacted ſuch a faith from any of his rational creatures : he always treats us as moral intelligent beings ; beings, whom his own inſpiration hath endued with underſtanding, and who muſt have ſome rational ground of conviction, before they can believe. Accordingly, when his own Son came into the world, he exhibited the moſt convincing proofs of his divinity and miſſion, before he demanded an unfeigned aſſent to them. He wrought many wonderful works, and to them he conſtantly appealed as a rational evidence, that he was the promiſed Meſſiah. When John ſent his diſciples to Jeſus with this queſtion, “ Art thou he that ſhould come, or do we look for another ? ” he did not give a poſitive answer, and demand his aſſent, without uſing any arguments for his conviction ; but he replied, “ Go and ſhew John thoſe things, which ye do hear and ſee. The blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleaned, and the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed up, and the poor have the goſpel preached to them.” This was treating the baptiſt like a reaſonable creature. He was firſt informed of
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the works of Jesus Christ, and then left to draw his own conclusion, respecting his divine character.

AND thus our blessed Saviour conducted towards all, with whom he conversed when on earth ; and whom he invited to become his disciples. He proved himself to be the Son of God with power, before he commanded them to believe on his name. Had he treated them in a different manner, or insisted upon their faith, without affording any evidence of his mission, it would have been an insult to their understandings, and a gross imposition on their credulity ! And had they believed on no other foundation than his own unconditional command, their faith would have done no honour to their judgment or their hearts. It is the duty of every man, and particularly so of every Christian, to be able to give some reason for the faith, which is in him. If asked, why he believes the gospel of Jesus Christ, and rejects the koran of Mahomet ; why he believes one to be a true prophet, and the other an impostor ; he must be able to assign something, which shall appear, at least, a justification of his sentiment. It is not enough to say he was educated in the christian faith : this answer will never silence the objections of infidelity, or satisfy any candid inquirer. Every man of study and reflection ought to be able to assign some better reason why he is a Christian. If others would excuse their acquaintance with the evidences of Christianity, from their want of ability or opportunity to inquire, the man of leisure and reading cannot have this excuse for his ignorance. A blind, implicit faith in him, is a very great reproach.

Was it right to believe, without any rational grounds, there is no error so fatal, no absurdity so gross, but might become an object of our faith. All

the corruptions of Christianity are derived from this source. In the darker ages, men believed the most shocking absurdities, because they were forbidden to inquire, and because they were told, faith was never so triumphant, as when it was contrary to all reason. Hence they subscribed to the doctrine of transubstantiation, the efficacy of reliques, the infallibility of the church, and many other points, which now shock the protestant faith, and will soon be universally rejected. Such absurd and mischievous opinions would never have gained any footing in the world, had it not been for an artful separation of faith from its evidence. By perverting the words of our blessed Saviour, men were led to give up their understandings, to believe they scarce knew what, and to take every thing upon the testimony of their tyrannical guides. These being the consequences of yielding a blind assent, we cannot suppose our Lord had this in view, when he said, *bleſſed are they who have not ſeen, and yet have believed.*

I PROCEED then, thirdly, to point out his true meaning, which I take to be this, that, in matters of great moment, it is an argument of great candor and ingenuity, to yield to the best evidence the subject will admit; and that there is more merit in believing upon rational grounds, than insisting upon evidence of sense. The story of Thomas will fully illustrate my meaning: he was repeatedly informed by his divine master, that he should suffer by the hands of the Jews, and on the third day, that he should rise again. If he was no impostor, the apostle might well suppose this event would come to pass, agreeably to his prediction. That he was none, he had the best evidence, because he saw the miracles he wrought, and the signs and wonders, by which he demonstrated his divine authority and mission. When, therefore, he was informed

formed by the other disciples, that they had seen the Lord, he ought not to have doubted either the fact itself, or their veracity. From what he knew of Jesus Christ, and his fellow-apostles, he had no reason to hesitate one moment. Had he acted like a rational Christian, he would have instantly yielded to their report, and rejoiced with them, that the Lord was risen again, to the utter confusion of his enemies, and to the everlasting consolation of his true disciples. But Thomas was in a very incredulous state of mind. Though his Lord had often predicted his resurrection, and the apostles declared they were eye-witnesses of it, still he did not believe. He unreasonably demanded the evidence of sense: nor was this all, he obstinately declared he would persist in unbelief, unless he were permitted to put his finger into the print of the nails, and lay his hand on his Lord's side. This was a very improper demand, and such as no man has any right to make: least of all did it become him, who had been conversant with Jesus Christ, and who had seen and heard too much, to have any doubt of his divine character.

IF Thomas might demand ocular demonstration of his Lord's resurrection, and might reasonably suspend his faith till that demand was answered, then might all those, to whom this great truth was proposed, insist upon the same evidence: and then might we also, at this day, resolve not to believe on the Son of God till we had seen him with our eyes, and our hands had actually handled him. But we know, God does not see fit to gratify all the idle wishes and absurd expectations of his creatures. He gives us sufficient evidence of those truths, which belong to our peace; and it is our duty to believe, and practise accordingly. When the rich man lift up his eyes in torment, and besought

besought father Abraham to send one from the dead, to convince his brethren of another state of existence, he replied, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them : they have sufficient evidence that death will not put a period to their being : the Jewish law-giver, and the succeeding prophets, have said enough to convince them of a future state, if they are open to conviction : if they still disbelieve, it cannot be for want of sufficient light and evidence, but because they are violently opposed to the truth ; and this opposition would confirm them in infidelity, even though one were to arise from the dead. This is the obvious meaning of that conference, which was held by the patriarch Abraham and the rich man, and which is recorded at length by the evangelist Luke.

It cannot be denied, that many things are highly worthy of our belief, which cannot, however, be demonstrated, or become objects of sense. The blessed God is invisible to mortal eye : nor can vulgar minds comprehend the nice and intricate reasonings, by which his being and perfections are sometimes argued ; and yet every man of common sense may be persuaded that God is, and that he is the wise and righteous governor of the world. From the things that are made, may be seen his eternal power and godhead ; so that they are fools, and without excuse, who say there is no God. The atheist is the most credulous person living, because he believes things that can be neither seen nor understood.

AGAIN—The future judgment, the resurrection of the body, and a life to come, are not objects of sight, nor are they capable of demonstration, in the strict and philosophical sense of the word, and yet it would be very unreasonable not to believe the certainty of them. They are all supported by such evidence, as
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ought to influence a candid mind : we are governed by less in our temporal concerns ; and it would argue a great defect in our understanding, and a most obstinate perverseness of heart, to reject either of these truths ; because moral certainty is the most we can arrive at, they being incapable of strict demonstration.

To apply this reasoning to the subject before us. We are informed by those, who were eye-witnesses of the fact, that Jesus Christ has arisen from the dead. The same, who assured Thomas they had seen the Lord, assures us in their writings, that they had repeated interviews with the blessed Jesus ; saw him alive after his passion, and for the space of forty days were with him ; and heard him converse of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. We may perhaps wish we had been present on these occasions ; or, we may now think it would be a great confirmation of our faith, could we be favoured with a sight of our ascended Lord. But how great soever a gratification this might be, and however desirable such an interview, we have no right to make it the condition of our faith. We have no right to say, we must behold the print of the nails, or the scar on his side, before we can believe. It is sufficient, that the resurrection of Christ is attested by persons, who knew him before his death, and saw him after he had arisen. It ought to satisfy us, that he appeared to his disciples and followers at different times ; that he eat and drank with them ; and that he was seen of more than five hundred brethren at once. And, finally, it should be an absolute confirmation of our faith, that the witnesses of this event could not imagine they saw all these things, when there was no reality ; that they could not be such impostors, as to propagate an absolute falsehood throughout the world ; or such
fools

fools, as to die in support of it : their characters will bear the strictest examination ; and their whole conduct demonstrably proves, they were neither enthusiasts, madmen, nor impostors.

Thus attested, we are bound to admit the resurrection of our Lord, though we have not sensible evidence of it. Though we must rely upon testimony, yet that testimony is so fair and impartial, that we act against the dictates of reason, if we do not make it the ground of our faith. What though our eyes have not seen, nor our hands handled the word of life, yet he was both seen and handled by those, who were as free from enthusiasm or credulity as ourselves ; and we ought to believe their record. They could not be deceived, nor could they have any inducement to deceive others. We shall soon plunge ourselves into the very thickest shades of infidelity, if we resolve, with Thomas, to take "no miracle upon hear-say ; or not to believe any one's senses but our own."

BUT the same evidence, which attends this important truth, attends the other essential doctrines of Christianity. The whole gospel is recommended by such convincing proofs, that, if we reject it, we act contrary to the light and evidence, which govern us in other cases. We act a very unreasonable part, if we pronounce the whole a cunningly devised fable, merely because we were not on earth, when it was published to mankind ; and we make a very unrighteous demand, if we insist upon a miracle at this time, for the foundation and support of our faith. God has sufficiently proved Jesus-Christ to be the promised Messiah, and his gospel to be the word of truth ; and if we reject either, our heart must be more in fault than our head. Our corrupt passions and inclinations must

must be the source of our infidelity ; and this must be our condemnation, that we chose darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil.

THE last thing I shall insist on from these words, is the superior blessedness of those, *who have not seen, and yet have believed.* To yield to such evidence as, seriously examined, may be esteemed a just foundation of our faith, is certainly the mark of a liberal, candid, and humble mind ; it shows we have no corrupt opposition to the truth ; that we are ready to receive it in the love of it. A man is pronounced blessed, not because he believes absurdities, nor because he believes without any proper evidence ; but because he yields to the best evidence the subject will admit, if that evidence amounts to a strong presumption : and if the faith of such a person has a proper influence over his temper and life, he is more blessed than he, who believes upon the testimony of his own senses. Had Thomas believed upon the report of the apostles, his faith would have been more excellent and meritorious than theirs. They had actually seen the Lord ; he had only been informed of the resurrection ; for which reason, his candor and simplicity would have been more exalted by believing, than theirs could possibly be : but the honour and merit of such a triumphant principle of faith he wantonly forfeited, because he resolved not to believe that Jesus had arisen, till he had been eye-witness of the fact.

LET his conduct teach us a wise lesson. A Saviour, whom we have never seen ; a system of religion, not originally addressed to us, nor, at this time, enforced by its own immediate author, are now proposed to our humble belief. Let us not, with Thomas, bind our faith to our senses ; but let us cheerfully yield our assent to the divine authority of the former, and to the

the undoubted truth and obligation of the latter. There is a merit in believing upon such evidence as is offered to us: it does not reflect upon our understanding, but it does honour to our heart; it is not a mark of our credulity, but of our candor; it is a proof that we are not disordered by passion nor blinded by prejudice, but that we are humble inquirers after truth, and are ready to embrace it.

BLESSED is the man, who, on this foundation, believes on Jesus Christ, and receives him as the only begotten Son of God: he acts the part of a reasonable being: he discovers that temper of mind, which is essential to a good character; and without which no man can be a Christian. To believe upon sufficient evidence, is an indispensable branch of religious duty. This is the work of God, that we believe on his Son. It is part of the duty assigned us, that we assent, with our whole hearts, to all the doctrines of revelation, and particularly to the resurrection of its divine author, by which the whole is confirmed. If we do not, we are guilty of a notorious act of disobedience, and must suffer for it in another world: for he that believeth not, shall be damned. His infidelity is a proof of such a temper of mind, of such obstinacy and blindness, as absolutely unfit a man for the kingdom of God.

CONVINCED therefore, by the many infallible proofs, by which Jesus Christ established his divine mission, let us not be faithless, but believing. Without waiting for his evidence, let us exclaim with the apostle, *Our Lord and our God!* Let us receive him as one, whom the father sanctified and sent into the world: sent to deliver mankind from ignorance and error; to deliver them from the reigning power of their lusts, from the triumphs of satan, and the victory of the grave.

grave. Let us receive his gospel as the inspired word of truth; and let us not be ashamed to own ourselves his disciples. If we believe in our hearts that Jesus is the Christ, we ought to confess with our lips that God hath raised him up to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sin.

PERMIT me, in fine, to urge it upon you, as a matter of the last importance, if you believe, to manifest your faith by your works, and by works to make it perfect. It was by a holy life, the first Christians evidenced the reality and the greatness of their faith. They did not build their hopes upon an empty speculation, but upon an active principle; which wrought by love, purified their hearts, and influenced them in all the ways of holy obedience. Their faith made them pious, devout, just, benevolent, temperate, humble, and universally submissive to the authority of Christ. They did not believe one thing and practise another; but between their faith and their practice, there was a perfect consistence.

AND thus must we also conduct in the present world, if we would make it appear to all, that we believe to the saving of our souls. Little will it avail to own the Son of God with our lips, if in works we deny him; and as little will it profit us, to believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, unless the persuasion of this truth raise us from the death of sin, to newness of life, and new obedience. For this end it is, we are exhorted to believe on the Saviour, that the truths of his gospel may sink deep into our hearts; and that we may have an unfailing principle of virtue within us. Let us then, live and act under the influence of this principle; let us yield ourselves up to the dominion of faith; let it be our great concern

cern to bring forth the fruits of it; and for pardon and acceptance, let us rely on Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, we love, and whom, though now we see not, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

Sermon VII.

On an evil Heart of Unbelief.

HEBREWS III. 12.

“TAKE HEED, BRETHREN, LEST THERE BE IN ANY OF YOU AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF, IN DEPARTING FROM THE LIVING GOD.”

IT would be very difficult to account for this admonition, if faith be a mere act of the understanding, and in no respect an object of choice.—Upon this supposition, it would be highly improper to exhort any one to believe; and as improper to condemn any person for refusing his assent. All applauses bestowed on the believer, and all reproofs levelled at the infidel, would be unjust and absurd. And the very terms, “an evil heart of unbelief,” would be as great a contradiction as language could furnish.

BUT, if we give the subject a serious and deliberate examination, we shall find no such opposition in the exhortations of the holy scripture, and the dictates of common sense. It is true, we are most solemnly

emly commanded to believe. And we are threatened with the utmost displeasure of God, if we disobey the divine command. Infidels are held up to view as highly criminal. And respecting such as leave the world in this state, we are assured, that they shall not see life; but that the wrath of God will abide on them. These, and many others of the same import, must be considered as very strong expressions. And they suggest the necessity of attending to the subject, and inquiring, whether faith be absolutely independent of choice; and whether the will have no influence in the formation of our character, as believers or infidels.

It is easy to perceive, how this question would be determined by the inspired author of the text. The writer to the Hebrews seems to be very apprehensive of their rejecting the gospel, in consequence of the wicked arts, which were practised upon them. He therefore, uses every argument to strengthen their faith, and to keep them steady to the christian profession. To impress them with the danger of unbelief, he calls their attention to the fathers of the Jewish nation; and shows how they were punished for their infidelity. The text is then introduced, "take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

My design, in the following discourse, is to explain the several truths contained in these words; and to point out the spirit of this exhortation.

"THE living God" is a term justly applicable to the supreme being. "He is from everlasting: and his years do not fail." He has a principle of life in himself. All other beings received their existence from a superior cause; and for its continuance, they depend on the power from which it was originally derived.

derived. But God is self-existent and independent : he lives by a necessity in his own nature. Consequently, the language in the text is applicable to him, in a sublimet sense, than to any other being in the universe.

Nor is it peculiar to the author of this epistle. In various parts of the holy scripture, the supreme Jehovah is denominated the living God. And in the book of Revelation, he introduces himself to the prophet in the following strain : " I am the beginning, and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." The reason, why essential life and immortality are so often ascribed to the true God, must be by way of distinction from other objects of worship. The gods of the Heathen were either inanimate beings, the lower creation, or dead men. Some paid divine homage to the sun, moon, and stars, to mountains, winds, or such visible objects as superstition had consecrated ; others worshipped birds, fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. And there were others, who prostrated themselves before departed heroes, or such as had blessed mankind by devising useful laws, or inventing useful arts. In contradistinction to objects to undelerving of religious homage, the supreme Jehovah is styled the living God ; living, in opposition to inanimate nature, or to beings, who enjoyed only a temporary and dependent existence.

But from this God, we are cautioned against a wilful departure, by the writer in the text. To depart from God is to deny his existence ; to give up his divine perfections and providence ; to insult his authority ; or to reject any religion, which bears the stamp of truth, and which he has condescended to reveal to mankind. By departing from the living God,

God, in the passage before us, the apostle meant a rejection of Christianity, after having believed and professed it. The persons, to whom this epistle is addressed, had received the gospel as the rule of their faith and lives. The completion of prophecy, and the signs and wonders, with which it was accompanied, had overcome all objections, and made them converts to Christianity. But, as the religion of Jesus was from above, as its author was the Son of God, as he had a special commission to preach those truths, which he delivered, and to perform the miracles, which established his character, to reject the Saviour, was to depart from God. Apostasy, therefore, is the idea comprehended in these terms.

We are not, however, confined to this limited view of the subject. It is true, we depart from God, when we make a public renunciation of the gospel; but we likewise depart from him, when we walk unworthily of our holy vocation. Without rejecting Christianity, we may lose its amiable temper, and grow inattentive to its laws. We may disregard the authority of Christ, as our moral governor; we may refuse to follow him as our pattern, and as far as respects our relation to him, as disciples, we may retain nothing but the name. In this case, we are guilty of a species of apostasy. And, in the same degree, in which we depart from the rules of the gospel, we may be charged with departing from God. Every omission of duty, is one step towards this state of dereliction. We recede still farther, as our offences multiply. And our departure is complete, when we give up Christianity as a fable, and relinquish, at once, its profession and practice. We read, in the history of our blessed Saviour, of some who turned back, and walked no more with him. And of this description
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are all, who make an absolute surrender of his religion. To despise the gospel is to reject the Saviour. And to depart from him, who bore a divine commission, is to depart from him, who gave it.

BUT from so high an offence against the living God, I proceed to the fatal cause assigned in the text. And that is, "an evil heart of unbelief." These terms deserve a particular examination. Is it a fact, that the heart has some influence over the understanding, in regard to the nature, objects, and degree of our faith? Or, do we necessarily believe or disbelieve, according to the evidence proposed to the mind? As this point shall be decided, we shall either approve or condemn the language of the apostle.

SOME have asserted, that the assent of the understanding is an act, over which the will has no control. The mind, according to their view of it, may be compared to a balance; and the arguments for, or against any proposition, to weights; and as the latter always determine the motions of the former, so they infer that the mind must necessarily yield to superior evidence. According to this representation, a man must of necessity believe the gospel, if the arguments in its favour outweigh objections. In this case, he could not, if disposed, withhold his assent; but must do homage to Christ as the Son of God.

OTHERS object to this representation; they maintain, that the immaterial principle, styled the mind, derives no illustration from the balance, and bears no resemblance to that passive instrument; they insist that arguments are not analagous to weights: and, appealing to experience, they affirm, that we can believe on slight grounds, when so disposed; and can resist such evidence as ought to satisfy any reasonable being, when our prejudices are opposed to the truth. Of this,

this, so many instances can be produced, that they consider the point incontestably established.

If we examine the subject with attention, we shall find that it has been darkened by many words; not that it lies beyond the reach of human comprehension. That there are truths, which we cannot but believe, is an undoubted fact; and that there are points, to which we cannot assent, being absolutely incredible, is as certain: but when any thing is proposed as an article of faith, it lies with us to give it a fair examination; to weigh the arguments brought in its favour; to consider objections; to compare the evidence on both sides, and to let the result determine our faith. We can most unquestionably take these measures to satisfy our minds; and as far as belief depends upon such previous examination, it is subject to the will.

To apply these observations to the christian revelation—When the gospel was first offered to the Jews, it was in their power to listen to its truths with candor, and to consider and compare the arguments, by which it was recommended; they were at liberty to recur to the ancient prophecies respecting the Messiah, and to inquire, whether they were accomplished in Christ. The works of our blessed Saviour were also submitted to their inspection; and they might satisfy themselves whether they were a mere imposition, or the finger of God. In a word, as Christ did not demand a blind assent to his religion, but exhibited certain proofs, on which they were to ground their faith, the Jews might have inquired for themselves; and their reception of the gospel, or its rejection, might have been the consequence of fair examination: but refusing Christianity, without previous inquiry, their

infidelity

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infidelity proceeded, not from a mistaken understanding, but an evil heart.

AND the same charge might be justly urged against us, if we were to follow their perverse example. It is in our power to examine both the internal and external evidence of the gospel; we may compare the predictions of those, who appeared before our Saviour, with the testimony of those, who followed him; we may examine the sacred record of his works, and inquire what marks it bears of authenticity; we may try the witnesses of his resurrection; we may trace the progress of Christianity from its infancy to this period, observe how it made its way in the world, and inquire what support it derives from the testimony of those martyrs, who died in its defence, and the arts of those Jewish and Heathen enemies, who attempted its overthrow. Finally, we may study the prophetick parts of the christian revelation, and see, for ourselves, whether any past events verify some predictions, and give us an earnest of the future accomplishment of others. Thus far we can proceed; and if, without taking such measures to ascertain its truth, we reject the gospel, we act unreasonably; and we prove that the heart is as much in fault as the understanding. It appears, therefore, that the will has great influence in determining our faith; and because we may refuse to attend to evidence, and in consequence of this refusal, may fall into infidelity, it follows, that we are not vainly cautioned against "an evil heart of unbelief."

I now proceed to consider this heart, as the fatal cause of every departure from the living God. By these terms we understand, not merely a renunciation of the gospel, but also a practical deviation from its principles and duties; and in proportion to the weakness

ness of our faith, it is conceivable that we should grow remiss in our behaviour. When persons, who once believed Christianity, become infidels, it is natural to expect that they should no longer feel its restraints : viewing its doctrines and laws as a human invention, and having no confidence in its promises and threatenings, their respect would be easily changed to contempt. Accordingly we find that religion meets with less civility from such persons, than from enemies of any other description : of all men, they are most inclined to vilify its author ; to ridicule his disciples ; and to cast contempt on sacred things.

BUT, in the different stages towards absolute infidelity, our departures from God and our duty will increase with our doubts. To operate as an effectual restraint, the laws of Christ must be sincerely believed ; and we must feel a perfect confidence in his doctrines, particularly those, which relate to a future state of retribution. As this confidence and this persuasion abate, must not Christianity then lose its moral influence ? And shall we not proceed from one act of disobedience to another, as we proceed from doubts to absolute unbelief ? In the same degree, in which we suspect the divine authority of a law, our reverence of it must be impaired ; and every doubt respecting futurity must weaken the motives to obedience.

THESE observations will be confirmed, if we examine the consequences of “ an evil heart of unbelief,” in some, whose actions are recorded in the volume of inspiration. Why did our first parents transgress a divine command ? because they did not give full credit to the divine threatening. Why did the crimes of the old world issue in their destruction ? because they did not believe Noah, a preacher of righteousness, who declared the indignation of God, and pre-

dicted a deluge. Why was Sodom, with three other devoted cities, destroyed by fire? because they discredited the testimony of Lot, who bore witness against their unlawful and unnatural deeds; and declared the penal consequences of their abominations. Why did many of the ancient people fail of that rest, which God had provided; and after having heard of the promised land, perish in the wilderness? because of their unbelief. Hence those words of the apostle, "but with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them, who had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?" Why were the successors of this generation visited with the judgments of God? Why were they carried into captivity? And why are the Jews at this day without a temple, without a city, and dispersed among all the nations of the earth? because they did not believe the threatenings of God, who, first by his prophets, and afterwards by his Son, admonished, exhorted, and intreated them to forsake their sins; and declared his resolution to punish them if they should persevere. And why do so many acts of unrighteousness dishonour the present age? Why is there so much wickedness in society? Why, in a christian country, are so many crimes daily committed? because that full credit is not given to the gospel, to which it is justly entitled: many, who will not presume to deny its authority, still will not acquaint themselves with the nature and strength of its evidence; they will not submit to the labour of examination; for which reason doubts and suspicions arise; and the stronger they are, the less sensible they become of the moral influence of Christianity. To be efficacious, as I have already observed, the gospel must
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be cordially received ; and we must repose an unshaken confidence in its truth. An evil heart of unbelief will, therefore, naturally account for our transgressions.

THE truths contained in the text, will justify the exhortation, with which they are preceded. "Take heed," says the apostle, "lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." This admonition is not levelled against a spirit of inquiry. Born in a christian country, and educated in the christian religion, we are not discharged from the duty of examination ; nor ought we blindly to believe, from the apprehension that inquiry will give rise to uncomfortable doubts, and that we endanger our faith by inspecting the evidences of our religion : so far from it, Christianity invites the examination of all, to whom it is offered ; and it is a principle of our religion, that we should be able to give to every man a reason for the faith, which is in us.

THE evil then, against which we are admonished in the text, is the rejection of Christianity without previous examination ; or the admitting of doubts and suspicions, through mere inattention to the subject. And it would become us to keep a constant watch over our hearts, lest they should be thus fatally perverted. With the shipwreck of faith, we shall probably make shipwreck of a good conscience. All the restraints of the gospel are necessary to repress our lusts and passions, and to preserve us from a deliberate course of wickedness. To what excesses then, may we not proceed, when those restraints are taken off ? What security have we, that we shall not go on from one act of disobedience to another ? And why may we not be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, when
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we cease to contemplate its malignity, and when its penal consequences are no longer before our eyes?

LET the apprehension of these excesses enforce the admonition in the text. Believing the divine authority of the gospel, we shall respect its precepts as the laws of God. Believing the sacred mission, and spotless purity of Christ, we shall have the allurements of a good example. Believing that the present state is not final, but that we shall be hereafter rewarded according to our works, we shall have a most powerful motive to fear God and keep his commandments. The holy scriptures, when sincerely believed, and diligently studied, are able to make us wise to salvation. Of what infinite importance is it therefore, that we hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering! How ought we to guard against doubts and suspicions? And how diligently should we examine the foundations of our religion, before we presume to reject it as the rule of our behaviour?

SUCH a measure must be attended with consequences, which no language can describe. To depart from the living God, after having consecrated ourselves to his service, must be regarded as no common offence. To reject the Son of God as our lawgiver and example; to pronounce him an impostor, and his gospel a mere fable, is an indignity, which he will not fail to resent. We may endeavour to banish these reflections; and we may succeed in keeping out of view the consequences of infidelity; but it is an awful truth, that we cannot finally escape, if we neglect this great salvation.

Sermon

Sermon VIII.

Office of Reason in Religion.

I CORINTHIANS X. 15.

“ I SPEAK AS TO WISE MEN : JUDGE YE WHAT
I SAY.”

THE apostle Paul, as he had been the instrument of converting the Corinthians, felt a generous concern to preserve them in the faith and purity of the gospel. Having been formerly a lewd, luxurious, and vicious people, he knew they were in great danger of relapsing into their early habits. This he might have inferred from the established laws of the human constitution. But the matter was put beyond all doubt, by the disorders, which prevailed in the Corinthian church, not many years after its establishment. In the first place, it was disturbed by parties and factions: in the next, it cherished in its bosom a notorious offender, who had been guilty of incest. A covetous and litigious temper had likewise discovered itself in that church. And finally, they had made some approaches towards idolatry, by turning the Lord's supper into an intemperate revel.

To impress them with their sinful deviations from christian duty, and to excite within them a just sense of their danger, the apostle addresses these faulty Corinthians in the following words: “ Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. *I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say.*” That is, I have been faithfully setting before you the errors, into which you
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have fallen ; and the guilt, which you may still further contract. Particularly have I admonished you against all those idolatrous practices, to which you were accustomed in your Heathen state. Let me now repeat the admonition. As you regard the honour of your religion, the favour of God, and the future salvation of your souls, flee from all approaches towards idolatry. I now speak as unto wise men. I address myself to those, who have had an opportunity to inform themselves on the subject. I call upon you to examine the matter with due attention. And I refer it to your own cooler and more deliberate thoughts, whether there be not reason in what I have advanced. In this manner, I have no doubt, St. Paul meant to express himself ; and that the Corinthians so understood him, there is every reason to believe.

BUT, in the further prosecution of the subject, I shall not confine myself to the case of these early Christians. The words of the text are applicable to all, who receive the christian revelation. It is the duty of every man to make use of that portion of reason, which God has given him. When we go to our bibles, we must take our understandings with us ; we must make them our guide, when we weigh the evidence of Christianity ; we must employ them to ascertain the meaning of the holy scriptures. In order to perceive the excellency, use, and beauty of divine revelation, we must have recourse to this faculty. And we must so far reverence the authority of reason, as to admit no doctrine to be divine, which is directly contrary to its intuitive perceptions. Of the truth of these positions, I feel the fullest conviction. And that the apostles had the like conviction, is manifest from the words which follow : " Prove all things ; search the scriptures : be ready to give an answer to every

every man, that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us: in understanding be men." All these directions suppose that reason is a very important faculty; and that it ought to be exercised on subjects of religion.

My design then, in the following discourse, is to point out the proper office of reason, so far as religion and revelation are concerned. And, first, as Christians, we should exercise our understandings upon the evidence of the gospel. Otherwise, how shall we be able to give a reason for the faith which is in us. To say that we were born and educated Christians, will not satisfy every inquirer. To say that we *feel* our religion to be true, will be considered rather as a flight of enthusiasm, than as a sober argument. There is no other way to satisfy others, and to discharge our duty to ourselves, than the application of our reasoning faculty to the internal and external evidence, on which Christianity rests.

It is argued in favour of our holy religion, that it bears internal marks of the truth. One office of reason then, is, to examine this argument. We should repair to the writings of the evangelists and apostles, and should seriously consider whether the account, which they give of Jesus Christ, his moral character, his doctrines and laws, his promises, discoveries, and his fate, be consistent with itself: whether his representations of God accord with our natural apprehensions of the supreme being: whether his delineations of duty consist with our internal sense of right and wrong: whether, in a word, the actions and discourses, ascribed to the blessed Jesus, appear to be worthy of so exalted a character. These are points of infinite importance; and they very properly come before reason. It is her business to view the subject on all sides.

fides. And it is her decision that should determine us to reject the koran, and embrace the gospel.

ANOTHER argument in favour of Christianity is derived from the accomplishment of prophecy. To determine the strength of this argument, is likewise the province of reason : that is, we must make use of our understanding to select the predictions, which are supposed to refer to Jesus Christ, and to see whether the reference be just. Thus did the noble Bereans, and they are commended for so doing. For their own satisfaction, they searched the scriptures : they reviewed the prophecies, which had been produced by the apostles. With them they compared the accounts, which they had received respecting Jesus Christ ; and they examined carefully and critically, whether there was a correspondence of the prediction and event. This was making a proper use of their rational powers : they behaved like wise men ; and their example is a rule for all.

AGAIN—Christianity rests on the evidence of miracles. It is the office of reason to examine the nature of those miracles ; their more immediate occasion ; the circumstances attending them ; their impression on the spectators ; and to ascertain the precise weight of evidence arising from this source. Unless we have recourse to reason in this case, how are we to distinguish the wonderful works, which are produced in attestation of the gospel, from the tricks of an impostor. Many persons have arrogated to themselves the power of working miracles. The magicians of old pretended to this power ; and if we may believe the Romanists, miracles are daily wrought by members of their communion. According to accounts published in catholic countries, we should suppose that scarcely any law of nature was left to its proper and usual

usual operation. In modern Rome, the dead are raised, the deaf hear, the lame walk, devils are cast out, and the most astonishing cures are effected, by the reliques of some despicable vagabond, who had been a burden to society whilst living, and who died like a brute. I would now ask, upon what principle we reject these miracles, whilst we admit those recorded in the new-testament? The answer is plain; bringing both to the trial of sober reason, we find an essential difference. The miracles performed by our Saviour and his apostles, were of the most important kind; they were done openly; they were wrought in the presence of persons, who were both able and disposed to detect the imposition, had there been any in the case; and they were displayed, not for the purposes of private gain or popularity, but to convince unbelievers. Very unlike these have been all succeeding miracles, particularly those said to be exhibited at the present day. They have been done in a corner. On the most trivial occasions they have been displayed. The spectators of them have been, not those who needed conviction, but such as already believed. And they have been attested by persons, whose interest it was to keep up the farce. Such are the discoveries made by reason, when exercised on this subject. Is it not then, a mark of the utmost weakness to undervalue this faculty? Is it not manifestly wrong to exclude it from the concerns of religion? Do we not shake the foundations of the christian faith, in proportion as we ascribe weakness and error to the human understanding?

If reason be an uncertain guide, its authority suspicious, and its province far remote from religious speculations, then, among all the religions, which prevail in the world, no man could have any just ground

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of preference. Whether he were a Jew, Pagan, Mahometan, or Christian, he would act with equal wisdom. But the case would be far otherwise, might reason be called in. The different religions in the world being submitted to the sober examination of this faculty, he might, with great propriety, make a choice among them; and might justify his choice by convincing arguments. Because reason pointed out its impiety and absurdity, he might reject Paganism. Because the same divine records, which furnish the origin of Judaism, furnish reasons to suppose that it is superseded by Christianity, he might reject the Mosaic institution. And he might be led to prefer the gospel to the koran, by comparing the respective characters of Jesus and Mahomet; the doctrines, which they taught; the rules, which they prescribed; and the measures, to which they had recourse, in order to propagate their religions. In this manner would reason come to the aid of truth; and so far from being hostile to the christian faith, it would furnish the only sure and stable foundation for believing.

WHAT I have said on this head will sufficiently show the use of reason in discovering the essential marks of a divine revelation, and the evidence necessary to support it: and it is the business of every one to exercise his understanding on this subject. This faculty was bestowed upon us for wise and benevolent purposes. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord;" and if we keep this light trimmed and burning, we shall make a just return to God, from whom we received it, and we shall do honour to ourselves. Its friendly rays will preserve us from enthusiasm on the one hand, and infidelity on the other: and we shall never want a substantial reason for the faith which is in us, so long as we receive the gospel with

with the temper of wise men, and calmly examine its evidence.

BUT further—It is the office of reason not only to examine the grounds, on which divine revelation claims our assent, but also to judge of its sense. How are we to know the meaning of the gospel, but by the exercise of our understandings? A book is put into our hands, containing many important doctrines, many useful precepts, many interesting discoveries: it is written in an ancient language; and has many allusions to ancient customs and usages. The style of this book is also, in many places, highly figurative; and it contains principles, some of which are capable of a general application, and others peculiar to the age, in which the volume was composed. Into what absurdities then, must every one fall, who repairs to the sacred scriptures, without taking reason with him as a guide.

IN the first place, he must run into endless errors, in respect to the doctrines of revelation. Many of those doctrines are expressed in figurative terms. Some, which relate to God; some, which relate to Jesus Christ; some, which respect futurity, are conceived in terms, which, though perfectly agreeable to the genius of the oriental languages, appear almost extravagant to a modern ear. I would now ask, what would not a man receive as divine truth, who should refuse to listen to reason, and should reject her comments upon these passages? What enthusiastic principles would he not find in his bible? What wild extravagances would he not build on a perverted scripture?

IN regard to God, he would ascribe to that infinitely pure and amiable being, both human parts, and human passions. For we read of the eyes, the face, the

the ears, the voice, and the hand of God : we read of his wrath, his pity, his grief, and his repentings. Sometimes God is styled love, sometimes light, and sometimes a consuming fire. These expressions can mislead none, who exercise their reason. That spirit, which is in man, will always help him to the true sense of these passages : and he, who makes a proper use of his understanding, will infer nothing from them, which is not strictly applicable to the divine character.

AGAIN—Jesus Christ is often described in language as highly figurative. He says of himself, “ I am the vine ; I am the door ; I am the good shepherd ; I am the resurrection, and the life ; I am the way, and the truth ; I am the light of the world.” And his apostles style him “ a lamb, a rock, the day-star,” and the like. Strong and bold as these figures are, they lead us into no mistake respecting the author of our salvation. Reason dictates in what manner they are to be understood and applied.

BUT, rejecting reason, should we interpret these expressions literally, how should we dishonour Jesus Christ, and disgrace revelation ? What absurdities should we impute to the christian system ? And how should we insult and disgust the common sense of mankind ? The consequences of refusing reason its authority, in these cases, will be manifest, if we only advert to one article in the Romish creed. The same night, in which our Saviour was betrayed, we read, that “ he took bread, brake it, and said, this is my body.” These words, the Romanists say, should be literally taken. Accordingly, whilst our Saviour was alive, and familiarly conversing with his disciples, he took his own body and brake it : and that very same body is also offered up in the sacrifice of the mass ;
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and received by the faithful as often as they commune. That is, a composition, which is nothing more than bread to the eyes, to the touch, and to the taste, is the real body of our Saviour ! But when you plead the testimony of sense, they plead the excellency of faith. And when you have recourse to reason, they reply, that it has no proper concern with mystery. So grossly is the scripture perverted, by refusing to natural reason its proper office.

BUT the doctrines of revelation are not the only points, upon which the understanding should be employed. We must call in the aid of reason, in order to ascertain the meaning of its precepts. Some of the rules, which we find in the new-testament, do not bind the present age. Others are of eternal obligation. Some are conveyed in figurative, others in plain language. How then are we to distinguish, but by the sober exercise of the understanding ? Our Saviour directs, "if smote on one cheek, to turn the other." Reason tells us, that this is a figurative expression, and that it means nothing more, than that there are times, when it would be more prudent, more politic, more amiable, and, in every view, better, to submit to the repetition of an injury, than to have recourse, even to legal measures, in order to obtain redress. Again ; our Saviour, in a manner, directs us "to hate our father, mother, wife, and children ;" reason tells us, that strong as these expressions may seem, they can imply no more than that we should love our earthly connections in a less degree than we love our Redeemer. Again ; the apostle Paul recommends the most passive submission to the civil authority. When we reflect on the subject, we instantly perceive, that the peculiar circumstances of Christianity, and the delicate situation of
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its early professors, demanded of them passive obedience, and non-resistance. But as circumstances have essentially changed, reason helps us to an interpretation of this precept more favourable to the rights and happiness of mankind. Again ; upon the subject of dress, marriage, and the use of meats, the same apostle delivers many sentiments, which, though pertinent at his day, do not apply to ours. Reason tells us to consider such directions as particular rules, which ought to be regarded, rather as articles of history, than matters of practice.

FROM the instances now produced, we must be convinced of the use and offices of reason, in our religious speculations. The Son of God addresses us as rational beings, and we should judge what he says : we should employ our reasoning faculty upon the evidences of his mission : we should have recourse to it, in order to ascertain what he has taught ; and what he would have us to do. In stating the motives of religion, we should make use of our understandings : by their aid, and under their direction, we should separate figures from plain speech : we should compare present and past times ; should contrast modern and ancient customs ; and should compare scripture with scripture. This is our duty ; and to discharge this duty, our reason must be set to work.

LET me then, exhort all, who are indulged with this faculty, always to bring it with them to the study of religion. A rational Christian is the most exalted character that any human being can sustain. To know what we believe, and upon what grounds we yield our assent : to be able to give a reason why we are Christians, rather than Jews, Mahometans, or Heathens : and to be furnished with a ready answer to those, who may inquire why we are of this religious denomination,

denomination, rather than any other ; these certainly are most desirable attainments. And to be able thus far to justify his religious peculiarities, every man ought to be ambitious.

BE persuaded then, to read, examine, and reflect. Under this impression, that faith and reason cannot be at variance, make all possible use of the latter, in order to settle the grounds of the former. Always regard the gospel as a reasonable institution ; and your duty as a reasonable service. Prove all things : examine all opinions : and compare all parts of the sacred volume. Whatever you hear, like the justly commended Bereans, search the scriptures ; and see whether they speak the same language. In a word, as Christians, and in understanding, be men. Thus sober and inquisitive, you may expect a divine blessing. The good spirit of God will enable you to judge rightly. Your ideas of the supreme being, of Jesus Christ, and the gospel salvation, will do honour to your understandings, and your temper and lives will do honour to your hearts. Your religion will be of that rational cast, which all, who reflect, must admire. Instead of bewildering yourselves with mysteries, you will modestly dismiss what you cannot comprehend. And instead of placing your religion in rites and forms, it will be your principal concern to “do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.”—Such will be the happy consequences of applying to yourselves those words of the apostle : “I speak as to wise men : judge ye what I say.”



Sermon IX.

Beneficial Effects of Christianity.

PSALM LXXII. 7.

“ IN HIS DAYS SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS FLOURISH;
AND ABUNDANCE OF PEACE, SO LONG AS THE
MOON ENDURETH.”

AS these words have been often applied to the reign of our blessed Saviour, and the moral influence of his religion, I shall offer no apology for making them the introduction to the following discourse. It is true, commentators have not unanimously agreed in this application: some have restricted the words to Solomon; and have supposed, that the blessings of his reign were here pointed out. Others have insisted, that a greater than Solomon existed in the imagination of the inspired poet; and that the prediction was not accomplished, till Christ came into the world. To pursue this controversy, and exhibit the arguments on both sides of the question, would divert our thoughts from a more important object. It is sufficient to say, that the application of the words before us, to the author of our religion, is supported by many, and very respectable authorities. Thus applied, the following description has inimitable beauty: “The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, so long
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as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust." The scenes, unfolded in this prediction, must delight all, who know the value of true religion, and are convinced of its beneficial influence on society.

My design, in the following discourse, is to consider the blessings communicated to mankind by the introduction of Christianity. The question has often been asked, whether society, on the whole, has been benefited by the gospel; whether the human kind are wiser, better, and happier, than in former ages; and whether, if their character and condition be, in any respect, improved, Christianity had any influence in producing so desirable an event? That society is under no obligations to the gospel, its enemies have endeavoured to prove by a variety of arguments. The confusions attending its introduction, they have particularly urged. They have taken notice of religious wars; and the cruelties, which contending sects have mutually inflicted on each other. They have likewise held up to the terrified imagination of protestants, that hellish tribunal, called the inquisition. They have also adverted to the memorable period, when millions, of all descriptions, took up arms, in order to recover the holy land from infidels; and have observed, that misery, destruction, and wickedness, marked their progress. Finally, they have enlarged on the various arts of hypocrisy, practised under the mask of religion, and the numerous impositions, of which Christianity has been the pretence. And combining all circumstances, they have drawn the conclusion, that former ages, without the gospel, were happier than succeeding ages with it. If this

were a true representation of facts, it would strangely militate with the prophetick descriptions of the gospel, and of the blessings, which it would ensure to mankind. Rapt into future times, Isaiah had announced the Saviour in the following strains : “ Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment, and with justice, from henceforth even forever.” A sentiment not unlike this, was also uttered by Zacharias : “ Whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them, who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.” This representation of the gospel was not long after confirmed by the heavenly host, “ Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men.” What construction shall be put on these words, if the christian religion has been so unfriendly to the world as its enemies have pretended ? Surely, such an account of things will remain forever irreconcilable with the prediction in the text, “ in his days shall the righteous flourish ; and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth.”

THAT certain evils attended the introduction of the gospel, cannot be denied. The contests and divisions, which it would produce in families, were both foreseen and foretold by our Saviour. He declared that the son would be at variance with the father ; the daughter, with the mother ; and the daughter-in-law, with the mother-in-law. But surely, Christianity is not answerable for these excesses. The aggressors, in this instance, were persons, who neither believed its truth, nor felt its influence. In families truly christian, there are no domestic divisions.

fions. Mutual forbearance and love are unfailing qualities in all, whose characters are formed on the principles of the gospel. Say not then, that the religion of Jesus caused the brother to deliver up the brother to death; the father, the child; and the children, their parents: but say, that the corrupt passions of the human heart produced these horrid acts of violence.

AND the same remark may be made in respect to other mischiefs unjustly ascribed to Christianity. That sects, denominated christian, have persecuted each other, is an established fact. But they found no direction to persecute in the gospel. So far from it, they could not consult that benevolent institution, without finding that it reprobated violence, and enjoined, in the strongest terms, forbearance and love. If the secret springs of action could be laid open, I have no doubt that it would clearly appear, that most religious persecutions originated in political causes. The monarchs and princes of this world have often drawn religion into their controversies; and have made use of its venerable name to give a sanction to their ambition. And in numberless instances, worldly interest has been the motive to persecute, and Christianity only the pretence. We are not then, to suppose, that fewer acts of violence would have been committed, if the religion of the gospel had not been introduced, but that the disturbers of mankind must have invented some other excuse. Never was more blood wantonly shed; never were the laws of justice and humanity more shamefully violated, than in ages preceding that of our Saviour. We may, therefore, conclude, that human passions would have continued to operate, even if no change had been made in the religion of the world.

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BUT, to come more directly to the point, in what respects has Christianity meliorated the condition of mankind? What are its present benefits? How far have the morals of the world been mended by it? And to what degree has it increased the sum of human happiness? In forming an answer to these questions, we labour under great disadvantages. And perhaps, it is impossible to answer them to universal satisfaction. The histories, which have come down to us, will throw but very little light on this subject. They relate the wars, which have ravaged devoted portions of the globe; and the political revolutions, which have changed the face of society. They describe the exploits of heroes, and the arts of statesmen. Or, if they take notice of religion, it is in so general a way, as to furnish no assistance in the inquiry before us. Even ecclesiastical history will not enable us to trace the moral influence of religion in those periods, of which it treats. We may learn from it, who presided in the church; what rites were observed; what doctrines were taught; what errors sprang up; how they were corrected; what instruments were employed to spread the knowledge of the christian system; how they succeeded; and who suffered for the truth. But to know how much good the religion of Jesus has actually done, we must be introduced to the private walks of life. We must be made acquainted with persons, who were too obscure to have a place in history; but whose virtues will cause them to shine with distinguished glory in the heavenly world.

There are many Christians, even at this age, who have the cause of religion at heart; and who live by faith in the Son of God. They are good parents, children, friends, and neighbours, because Christian-
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ity binds them to perform the duties resulting from these several relations. In obedience to the gospel, they are strictly honest in their dealings ; and they are disposed to do good to the utmost of their ability. In a word, they are habitually devout, humble, chaste, temperate, and, in all respects, exemplary, because the precepts of Christ have a steady operation on their hearts and lives. Such persons there now are in the christian world. Many, to whom this description may be applied, have, since our remembrance, gone off the stage. And we may conclude, that there have been Christians, both in principle and practice, ever since the first converts were made by the Son of God. But how few of those, whom we know to be persons of pure and undefiled religion, would find a place in the page of history ? Such virtues as piety, charity, honesty, and purity, in humble life, are not recorded. And hence the difficulty of measuring the moral influence of religion ; and ascertaining the real good, which it has done to mankind. Had the recital of good actions been as entertaining as that of great ones ; and had history been as faithful to the merits of a Christian, as to the exploits of a hero, we should not have wanted information on this head.

BUT though the moral effects of Christianity have not been carefully recorded, yet we can make some discoveries, which reflect the highest honour on the gospel. In the first place, we find, that wherever Christianity prevailed, it put an end to human sacrifices. The horrid practice of propitiating the gods by immolating human beings, prevailed in the most civilized countries. The nations, extirpated by the sword of Israel, were particularly chargeable with this ferocious superstition. They caused their sons
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and daughters to pass through the fire. And the Greeks and Romans followed their example. Not less than three hundred human victims have been offered on some great occasions. But an evil, which philosophy could not cure, yielded to the mild and benevolent influence of the gospel. Christianity, wherever it came, exposed the enormous wickedness of "giving the first-born for any transgression, the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul." And as many nations, as received this divine religion, desisted from a practice so unnatural and abominable. One great advantage derived to society from the introduction of the christian system, was, therefore, the rescue of thousands of the human species from the slaughtering priest, and flaming altar.

SECONDLY—The religion of Jesus, wherever it obtained an establishment, put an end to the cruel practice of exposing gladiators for the publick entertainment. During many centuries, the eyes of the multitude had been delighted by these abominable scenes. Human beings were, by course of discipline, transformed to brutes; and, when sufficiently instructed in the art of giving and receiving the deadly blow, they were brought on a public stage, that the people might be amused with their wounds and death. To spectacles so horrid in themselves, and so pernicious in their tendency, Christianity opposed its sacred influence. It taught men to turn with abhorrence from every violation of the great laws of humanity. As religion gained ground, the practice, of which I have been speaking, lost its advocates and admirers. And when the Roman world became Christian, it was suppressed by an imperial edict. The protection of many lives from wanton destruction, and the preservation of the human mind from
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the debasing influence of sanguinary spectacles, are blessings, for which society is indebted to the gospel.

THIRDLY—Through the influence of the christian religion, the exposing of infants and slaves to perish with hunger, and to be devoured by wild beasts, no longer disgraces the human character. I need not inform you, that this was universally practised, and without shame or remorse, before Christianity exhibited the injustice of refusing protection to such miserable objects. Till men learned from the gospel to set a proper value on human life, compassion was sacrificed to convenience. But no sooner did the rays of divine truth enlighten their minds, and warm their hearts, than the feeble infant found a parent ; and the slave, exhausted with labour and years, found an arm to support him. Millions of suffering objects, rescued from destruction, furnish, therefore, another triumph to Christianity.

FOURTHLY—The introduction of this most benevolent religion, has, in many instances, softened the rigours of slavery. It was not uncommon, in ancient times, to treat this unhappy class of persons with the most unjustifiable severity. Torture and death might be inflicted by their inhuman masters, whenever the suspicion of a fault stimulated their rage. They were considered as having neither rights nor feelings, even in free countries, and by men, who styled themselves patrons of civil liberty.

BUT in every family, where Christianity found admission, a new scene was presented. The distance between master and slave was lessened. In obedience to the gospel, the former ceased to be a tyrant ; and the latter, experiencing kind usage, had new motives to be faithful. Nor was it seldom the case, that Christianity gave freedom to those, who had been held

held in bondage. Many, on becoming Christians, set their slaves at liberty, esteeming such an act of generosity highly pleasing to their common master, though not expressly commanded by the gospel. Breaking the chains of some, and ensuring humane usage to others, the christian religion has, therefore, been a blessing to the world.

FIFTHLY—Since the appearance of our divine Saviour, war has been productive of less misery than in former times. It is true, the gospel has not exterminated those passions, whence come wars and fightings: and it must likewise be acknowledged, that, on some occasions, nations denominated christian, have contended with brutal violence. Certain causes have conspired to inflame the passions to a high degree, and to make them insensible of the obligations of common humanity. But hostile nations do not generally act so ferocious a part. A vanquished and supplicating foe now finds mercy. Prisoners are exchanged, and not slaughtered or reduced to bondage. The same captives are treated with kindness and respect, who would once have been led in chains by an insolent conqueror. Even in the darkest ages of Christianity, and when its principles were most corrupted, it often set bounds to the ravages of the sword. Though it has not caused wars and fightings to cease, yet, if it has rendered them less calamitous, society is much indebted to the gospel.

SIXTHLY—Since Christianity has enlightened and warmed the human breast, the most benevolent institutions have been devised for the relief of those, who are objects of compassion. Before the Son of God appeared, these institutions were unknown in the world. Till Christianity taught men to feel, the unfortunate debtor was chained at the door of his creditor;

creditor ; was scourged at pleasure ; his wife and children were exposed to sale ; and he was subjected to every species of inhumanity, till payment should be made. Till Christianity softened the heart, the poor depended on the contributions of a precarious charity ; and those, who suffered under the united burden of want and sickness, had no other resource but in the goodness of those, who might happen to hear their groans, and be touched by their miseries. But through the influence of Christianity, they, who once supplicated mercy, may now command the kind offices of their neighbours. The rights of the poor and miserable are ascertained by the christian religion ; and so active is the benevolence excited by it, that multitudes are comfortably supported, who must otherwise have perished. The kind offices, to which Christianity disposed its professors, were early observed by its jealous enemies : and Julian, one of the most virulent, reluctantly proposed their example to his heathen subjects. Having taught men to do good, the gospel, therefore, has rendered essential service to the world.

FINALLY—The christian religion has served the interests of society, by branding with infamy many practices, which were common in the most polished ages, but which were a scandal to human nature. The shocking impurities of the Heathen are often mentioned in the gospel. Many of those impurities had the sanction of religion : for this reason, the first characters in society gloried in their shame. But, though unsubdued, those fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, have been laid under some restraint by the gospel. There is more decency in the world ; and the rising generation have not so many vicious examples before their eyes.

I HAVE now mentioned some of the many advantages derived to society by the christian religion. I might have pointed out other blessings, which must be referred to this source; but the representation, already made, must convince us, that nations enlightened by the gospel, are unspeakably wiser, better, and happier, in consequence of this dispensation. And yet, this is the religion, which encountered so many enemies, when first offered to mankind. This is the religion, against which kings set themselves, and rulers took counsel. This is the religion, which so many, in early times, derided and vilified; and to destroy which, learning and eloquence employed their united force. This is the religion, which so many, in all ages, have vainly attempted to put down by argument, or to injure by misrepresentation. This is the religion, which some are disposed to give up, without examination; and others, from want of reflection, neglect and despise. In a word, this is the religion, which has so few independent, zealous, and consistent professors; and from the duties of which, so many are disposed to turn aside into the paths of licentiousness.

BUT a religion, which has the patronage of heaven, must rise superior to its enemies. It is impossible that such a cause should not prevail. The reflecting part of mankind must know, that Christianity has the promise of the life, which now is, and of that, which is to come. And they, who believe its truth, and are sensible of its excellence, must pray that its influence may be universal. Then would righteousness flourish; and abundance of peace bless mankind. Then would oppression, of all kinds, come to an end. Then would the judgments, which are abroad in the earth, cease forever. Then would all the friendly
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and amiable affections of the human heart be in constant exercise. And then should we have a foretaste of the tranquillity of heaven, and of the love, which will unite us, when conducted by Christ to the presence of his father and our father, of his God and our God.



Sermon X.

On the Knowledge of God.

ROMANS I. 28, 29.

“AND EVEN AS THEY DID NOT LIKE TO RETAIN GOD IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE, GOD GAVE THEM OVER TO A REPROBATE MIND, TO DO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT CONVENIENT; BEING FILLED WITH ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.”

THE state of morals in the heathen world deserves the serious attention of all, who are favoured with the gospel. It has been pretended, by the enemies of revelation, that pagan principles, and pagan ceremonies, were not unfavourable to human virtue. It has been confidently asserted, that true piety often presented itself before the heathen altar; and that heathen festivals were scenes of innocence and cheerfulness. That this is a gross misrepresentation of facts, will be acknowledged by all, who have turned their attention towards this subject. They will perceive, that the specious colouring, which has been given to the principles and practices of the heathen

heathen world, is only one of the many arts employed to injure Christianity. Nor can it be denied, that infidelity would have some ground of exultation, if it could be proved that the gospel, when first published, did not make men wiser and better than it found them ; and that its influence, in succeeding ages, has not essentially mended and purified the human character.

FACTS, however, will not permit us to view Christianity in this unfavourable light. That hitherto, its influence has been partial, and its effects inadequate to its intrinsic excellency, is a melancholy truth. No impartial Christian will pretend, that the gospel has gained such a victory over ignorance and wickedness, superstition and impiety, as might have been expected from the union of its peculiar doctrines, precepts, and motives. Still it has conferred unspeakable benefits on society. It has made men ashamed of practices, which were common among the Heathen. And it has imposed some restraint on passions, which raged without control, before Christianity pointed out their infamy here, and the ruin, which would attend them hereafter. By an induction of particulars, it might be proved, that since the promulgation of the gospel, there is, in the world, far more real piety, more justice, more chastity, more benevolence, more temperance, and more rational happiness, than in any preceding period.

SUCH important blessings being derived from Christianity, we cannot wonder that the apostle should declare, that he was not ashamed of the gospel ; and that he should profess his readiness to preach it in the metropolis of the Roman empire. He well knew the state of morals, both among the Jews and Gentiles, of his own age. He was sensible, how far the
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former had departed from the institutions of Moses : and his intimacy with the latter, had given him an opportunity to observe, how little regard was paid to the laws of nature, by those, who had no other rule of moral action.

THE chapter, whence I have taken the text, places this subject in a very affecting light. Having observed, that God had discovered himself to the Heathen, in the works of nature, and dispensations of providence, he proceeds to charge them with ingratitude and folly, in disregarding these convincing proofs of his eternal power and godhead. He remarks, that “ professing to be wise, they had become fools.” And as a proof of it, he mentions their “ changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” In resentment of such an indignity to himself, and such an abuse of their own reason, the apostle declares, that God abandoned them to the vilest affections. He then mentions their particular crimes ; and they were such as indicated the most degraded state of mind, being an offence against decency, against nature, and the acknowledged principles of common morality. The text follows : “ And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient ; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity ; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.” Such were the enormities
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of the Heathen, at the time, when the Saviour appeared. Such were the consequences of disregarding the testimony of nature and providence. Such the punishment of that vanity, which tempted men to deny the being of a God ; or disinclined them to “ retain God in their knowledge.”

To render this subject a useful lesson to ourselves, I shall consider what is implied in the knowledge of God ; show how this knowledge is communicated to us ; point out the means by which it may be preserved ; and then state the certain consequences of retaining, and of losing it. First—What are we to understand by the knowledge of God ? I answer, not a clear and perfect comprehension of his character, but such a general idea of his nature, will, and designs, as may be obtained from the contemplation of his works, and the study of his word. Beings of our very limited capacities, must despair of finding out the Almighty to perfection. Eternity, immensity, omnipotence, are objects too great for the human understanding. Nor can we form adequate ideas of the moral excellencies of his nature. The manner in which he sustains, and governs the universe, is, of necessity, a secret to us. And numberless events, which take place by his permission or appointment, will be mysterious in our eyes, till we have new faculties ; and can take a nearer view of his dispensations.

In what then, consists the knowledge of God ? In the knowledge of his being, his unity, his independence ; in the knowledge of his relation to us, as a creator, preserver, and benefactor ; in the knowledge, that he is possessed of power, which nothing can control ; of wisdom, that nothing can escape ; of goodness, which extends to every creature ; in the
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knowledge of his will, as it respects the whole conduct of our lives here ; and his designs, as they relate to our happiness hereafter. If we have clear and rational views of these things, we know God, as the terms are used in the text. Nor is it any real misfortune, that we cannot answer all the curious questions, which may be suggested by speculations on the divine nature.

THE great point, which it concerns us to ascertain, is the unity of God, as the only proper object of our homage ; his character, as the object of our confidence ; his will, as our governor ; and his intentions, as the arbiter of our fate. Have we this acquaintance with the author of our being ? Do we know that he only is God ? Do we know that our prayers and praises are due to him only ? Do we know that he is not far from any one of us, and that he is able and willing to help us ? Do we know what he requires of us, as the condition of his friendship ? Do we know our duty to him, our fellow-men, and ourselves ? Do we know that the present is preparatory to a future state ; and that it depends upon our behaviour in this world, whether we shall be crowned with glory, or covered with shame ; whether we shall be happy or miserable in the world to come ? If our minds are generally enlightened on these points, we have the knowledge of God.

I PROCEED then to shew, secondly, how this knowledge is communicated to us. And it must be admitted, that the volumes of nature, and revelation, are the true source of our information. The Heathen had access to the former. Before their eyes, were the works of God ; or, as the apostle expresses himself, the things which are made : and from those things, they might have ascended to their author.

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From the wonderful structure of the heavens, from the air, and from the earth; from their own powers of body and mind: from the course of things in the natural world, and from the order of providence, they might have deduced the invisible things of God. It was a very obvious conclusion, that such stupendous effects must have an adequate cause. Hence the observation of the apostle, "that which may be known of God is manifest to them; for God hath shewed it unto them."

IN like manner, God continually exhibits himself to us in his works, and providential administrations. "The heavens declare his glory, the firmament his wisdom, the earth his power; its various productions, his bounty; the course of nature, his unremitting energy; the series and tendency of events, his direction; and man, his moral image! All the works, and ways of God, may, therefore, be regarded as a source of religious information. They do unite in one harmonious testimony to the existence of God, and to his wisdom, power, and benevolence. For this reason, devotion gives a voice to inanimate objects; and piety calls upon them to praise their maker.

BUT though God has discovered himself to us in his works, and in his administrations, still the sacred volume is the principal source of our information. From the gospel of Christ, we derive the most satisfactory knowledge of our creator, governor, and judge. That glorious instructor, who was specially commissioned, and eminently qualified, to enlighten the world, has declared to us, the natural and moral perfections of the Deity; has borne a glorious testimony to his unity, his unalienable right to our services, his holiness, justice, forbearance, veracity, and benevolence; has taught us what God expects and requires

requires, as a proof of our gratitude and submission ; has prescribed our duty in all branches, and in its full extent ; has established the efficacy of repentance ; has brought life and immortality to light ; and having revealed, has informed us how we may secure, this great salvation. The necessity of his own interposition, the expediency of his suffering and death, and the blessings finally resulting from his mediation, are, in respect to us, branches of the knowledge of God. And for information on these interesting points, we are wholly indebted to the gospel. Comparing, therefore, the volumes of nature and revelation, we must be sensible of the infinite superiority of the latter, as a resource of religious knowledge.

HAVING thus shown how the knowledge of God is obtained, I proceed to consider, thirdly, the means, by which it may be preserved. Addressing himself to the Corinthians, St. Paul has this remark, " some have not the knowledge of God ; I speak this to your shame." And in the chapter, from which I have selected the text, it clearly appears, that the loss of this knowledge is not merely possible, but that it may be justly apprehended, unless proper measures be used to prevent it. The apostle produces instances, in which God has withdrawn himself from those, who had said in their hearts, " depart from us ; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

To avert so great a calamity, it is necessary that we should meditate frequently on the supreme being, on his glorious character, on his relation to us, on his holy will, on his providence, and on his designs. When we behold his works, our thoughts should ascend to their author. When we reflect on the events, which take place, we should make a pious transition to their invisible director. But most of all,

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should we study the inspired volume, and dwell on its sublime discoveries, relative to the nature and will of God. We should not suffer the cares and pleasures of the world to prevent a daily recurrence to the sacred oracles. Some moments should be reserved for consulting a book, which contains an authentic account of our creation, and creator; and which reveals truths of infinite importance to the human kind.

If we choose to retain God in our knowledge, we must, therefore, converse frequently with his word. The holy scriptures must be consulted, not merely to decide some controverted point, but to confirm good impressions already made. Their representation of God and our duty, though familiar, must not cease to command our daily attention. We must endure the repetition of truths often communicated; we must meditate on them, though they have often employed our thoughts; we must bring them home to our hearts, and consciences, if we would not lose such a valuable attainment. To neglect the word of God, is to expose ourselves to the loss of that knowledge, which is essentially connected with our eternal welfare.

We must also, to preserve the knowledge of God, maintain a continual intercourse with him. We must invoke his name; celebrate his perfections; adore his providence; thank him for mercies; acknowledge our offences against him; implore his forgiveness; spread all our wants before him; and intercede with him for the whole family of mankind. The offices of devotion, constantly performed, will not suffer us to forget our maker. Prayer, joined to the study of the sacred pages, and serious meditation on the laws of God, and on his character, as drawn in those

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pages, will necessarily tend to preserve the knowledge, on which so much stress is laid by the apostle.

FURTHER—We must not neglect any of those means, which God has appointed for this important purpose. Those productions of human piety and industry, which throw light on the character of the blessed God; which illustrate our duty to him; and which enforce that duty by rational motives, should have their share of our attention. We should consult writings of a devotional and practical nature: and we should listen to those moral and religious counsels, which are publicly inculcated. Thus, by study, by meditation, by prayer, by giving heed to such writings and discourses, as have God and religion for their subject, may we retain our knowledge of the former, and our reverence of the latter. We shall not let any thing escape, which is essential to our improvement and happiness, if we set a proper value on the means of obtaining an acquaintance with our maker; and do not neglect to avail ourselves of them.

I HASTE, in the last place, to show the necessary consequences of retaining, and of losing the knowledge of God. The only security of a religious temper, and of a good life, is an habitual conviction of the divine presence and authority. This is the spring of all virtuous actions. When the mind is deeply impressed with these truths, that there is a God; that he is not far from his creatures; that he is a witness of all their actions, whether good or bad; that he detests every false way; that he has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness; and that he will call every human being to a strict account; when the mind, I observe, realizes these truths, it will naturally influence the will. Such a knowledge, and habitual recollection of God, will have

have a powerful tendency to enforce the laws of truth and honesty, the laws of temperance and humility, the laws of piety and benevolence. It may be reasonably expected, that the man, who retains this knowledge, will be an example of shining virtue. Justice in his dealings, faithfulness in his engagements, moderation in his indulgences, meekness and patience under wrongs, devotion to his maker, kindness to the miserable, generosity to the unthankful, and goodness to all; if these moral and christian virtues exist in any human being, we may presume upon finding them in him, who retains the knowledge of God, as the terms have been defined. This principle, according to the constitution, and tendency of things, must be productive of every good work.

ON the other hand, what is to prevent an inundation of vice, when the knowledge of God, and a respect for his authority, are effaced from the mind. What is to supply the place of religious considerations, and motives? Can human laws render men sober, righteous, and devout? By no means: they can prevent evils of a particular description, and they can regulate certain actions, which concern man in his political capacity. But there are numberless vices, which human laws cannot prevent; and there are many virtues, which those laws cannot enforce. The wisest government cannot, by any lawful exercise of power, prevent envy, malice, and revenge, slander, avarice, pride, and selfishness, intemperance, idleness, and impiety. Nor can such a government, by its wisest institutions, compel men to feel compassion, and to exercise charity; to do good to their enemies; to be fair and generous in their dealings; to speak the truth on all occasions; to be pure in heart, and chaste in actions. And yet the cultivation of these principles,

principles, and the practice of these virtues, nearly concern the interests and happiness of society.

If men do not choose to retain God in their knowledge, it follows, then, that human wisdom cannot supply his place. No; when persons have thrown off those restraints, which his presence and authority once imposed, they are easily reconciled to the worst practices. The laws of society will not reach their case; and a sense of honour, and a regard to appearances, can have neither an extensive nor a lasting influence. We have only to observe the shameful, the unnatural, the horrible, and the ruinous vices of the Heathen, to be convinced of the wickedness of man, when God is forgotten; when his authority is despised; and when the laws and sanctions of religion are discarded.

I MUST, therefore, as an application of the subject, earnestly intreat you to hold fast those principles, which you have received; and to be earnest, above all things, to retain the knowledge of God and religion. Would you avoid those things, which are not convenient? Does the thought of a reprobate mind fill you with horror? Can you conceive of no greater degradation of your nature, than to be filled with all unrighteousness? Are you shocked with the various crimes and enormities, which make up the charge against those, who were averse to the knowledge of God? Then do you set a just value on that knowledge, and take every measure to preserve it. Let nature and providence teach you. Let the prophets of ancient times, let the inspired apostles, and above all, let the Son of God be your instructors. Let the inspired writings be the companion of such hours, as you can redeem from the world and its concerns. Be earnest with him, who gives liberally,

to give you still clearer views of his adorable character, and holy will. Refuse not a candid attention to those exhortations, admonitions, and instructions, which are dispensed by persons professionally called to spread the knowledge, and inculcate the practice of virtue. Being swift to hear, careful to retain, and diligent to serve God, and to discharge your duty to man, you may rationally hope to be an honour to human nature, and to be qualified for a better state.

Sermon XI.

On searching the Scriptures.

JOHN V. 39.

"SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES."

"**G**OD, who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son." And the gospel, which this divine instructor published to the world, and sealed with his blood, must be considered as an inestimable blessing. It contains the religious doctrines, which we ought to believe, and the moral duties, which we are bound to practise. It throws divine light on the character and government of God. It clears up all doubts and difficulties respecting a future state. And it encourages the christian temper and practice, by setting before us the purest examples, and the noblest motives. If this be a just description of the sacred volume, how reasonable

reasonable is the injunction in the text? What can we do better than to search those pages, which are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness"? By such a wise use of the means of religious information, the man of God may, in a sense, be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

It is happy for us, that we have free access to the oracles of God. This is a privilege, for which we are indebted to the reformation. Till this event took place, Christians were kept in ignorance by the wicked policy of an ambitious order of men, who assumed the sacred name of religious instructors. These spiritual tyrants locked up the scriptures in an unknown tongue. They taught the multitude, that it was their duty to believe, not to inquire. And instead of declaring the counsel of God, they imparted so much only as suited their interested views and designs.

BUT the daring spirit of Luther broke the shackles, which religious tyranny had forged; and the example of this great reformer was not only applauded, but followed by many others. The holy scriptures were rescued from oblivion. For the benefit of the multitude, they were rendered into their own language; and *they* were encouraged to consult them, as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. This direction is founded on the best authority, even that of our Saviour. Discoursing with the Jews, he commanded them to "search the scriptures." And were he now on earth, he would address us in the same language.

1. IN the following discourse, I shall endeavour, in the first place, to show how the sacred volume is to be searched and studied.

2. AND

2. AND secondly, I shall consider the probable result of our inquiries.

NOT every one, who turns over the sacred pages, can, with any propriety, be said to study them. Many persons read in so careless a manner, that they derive very little information from the word of God. Their eye and their thoughts are very differently employed. Hence, though, in appearance, ever learning, in reality, they never come to the knowledge of the truth. To receive that information from the gospel, which it is capable of imparting, we must search with attention, and inquire with impartiality. We must take every passage in connexion. We must make a proper allowance for the figurative modes of expression, which were common in the East. We must compare dark passages with those, which are plain, and make the one a comment on the other. And if the unavoidable cares of life will not suffer us to go into a minute examination of all parts, we must principally attend to those, which describe the perfections and providence of God; the example of Jesus Christ; the practical instructions, which he delivered; the motives to obedience, which he proposed; and the salvation, which he revealed. Whoever observes these rules, must, I conceive, find his reward in searching the scriptures.

WITHOUT attention and impartiality, it is impossible that we should make any progress in divine knowledge. To succeed in any undertaking, we must be in earnest: and most certainly, a diligent application to the word of God is indispensable, if we would become wise to salvation. A superior understanding is by no means necessary, in order to study the gospel to advantage. But a proper attention

tion to the subject, and a disposition to be informed, cannot be dispensed with. They are the qualities, which ennobled the Bereans in the eyes of the apostle; and which led a sacred historian to speak of them in terms of high commendation. When the gospel was preached in their synagogue, they received it with candour and good manners. But still, they thought it expedient to inquire, before they commenced Christians. Accordingly, retiring from the synagogue, they took up the scriptures, and examined for their own satisfaction. The accounts, given them of Jesus Christ, and his religion, they compared with the prophecies, which went before. This practice they observed daily. And the consequence was a cordial assent to the christian religion. A conduct so rational, and so highly becoming sincere inquirers after the truth, presented a striking contrast to that of their Thessalonian neighbours. They discovered an inveterate hatred towards the religion of Jesus, and its preachers. And for this reason, they are introduced into the sacred story, as a shade to set off the Bereans. "These," says the inspired author, "were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore, many of them believed."

BUT further—To search the scriptures to advantage, we must take every passage in its connexion, and rejecting the artificial divisions, which have been introduced, we must peruse the sacred page as we would any other book. Nothing has contributed so much to obscure the inspired volume, as the injudicious manner, in which some parts of it are divided. It is no uncommon thing for a chapter to begin in the midst of an argument. And the verses often carry

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with them the appearance of so many distinct propositions, or aphorisms, when, in reality, they are only portions of some narrative, or links in some chain of reasoning. This is an inconvenience, both to the learned, and unlearned reader. And it has been seriously lamented by many commentators on the gospel. One of the most celebrated inquirers after religious truth, considers it as a principal cause of that obscurity, which we perceive in some of the writings of St. Paul. He observes, that "our minds are so weak, that they have need of all the helps that can be procured, to lay before them, undisturbedly, the thread, and coherence of any discourse." Hence, he infers, that an unnatural separation of sentences, and the breaking up of narrations and arguments into distinct fragments, must render it difficult to follow the writer. From the epistles of Paul, he makes a transition to those of Cicero; and he inquires, whether the latter, if divided like the former, would not become far less intelligible and entertaining than they now are?

THESE remarks, joined to our own experience, show the necessity of overlooking artificial divisions, and attending to the general design of the writer, and the connexion of his discourse. Where it can be done, a whole book should be read at once. But when this is impracticable, we must follow our best judgment, and be governed by those divisions, which the nature of the subject shall mark out. Unless we proceed after this manner, we shall never have a clear and connected view of the truths contained in the sacred oracles. Our religious ideas will be confused. And the darkness will not be chased from our minds, notwithstanding "the day-spring from on high hath visited us."

To

To "search the scriptures" to advantage, we must likewise make an allowance for the figurative modes of expression, which were common in the East. Many of those figures are to be found in the word of God. But the same common sense, which guides us in other casts, will help us in this. When we go to the scriptures, we should take our reason with us. And this reason will generally distinguish popular expressions from those, which are to be understood in a literal sense. Under the direction of such a guide, we shall not suppose that God has human parts or passions, though, in accommodation to our weakness, the scripture *seems* to convey such an idea. We shall not suppose that Jesus Christ is literally a vine, that the sacramental bread is literally his body, or the wine his blood, though his language seems to have this import. A very moderate share of understanding will guide us through the labyrinth of figure and metaphor, if we only call it to our aid. The sacred volume requires no greater indulgence, than that, which is freely granted to all human productions.

To proceed—If we would "search the scripture" with any prospect of success, we must compare dark passages with those which are plain, and make the one a comment on the other. To this rule, no reasonable objection can be made. It is the very rule, which we observe, when we peruse the works of uninspired authors. And as the sacred writers were often left to choose their own expressions, the same measure, which is used in other cases, will be proper in theirs. We should consider how the same fact is related in different parts of the inspired history. We should inquire how the same truth is expressed; and by what arguments it is supported, by different writers.

writers. We should diligently compare parallel places. Proceeding in this manner, many difficulties will be cleared up, and we shall find a wonderful harmony, where the scripture has been injuriously charged with contradiction. Thus has the history of our Saviour been illustrated; and the doctrines of Paul and James been reconciled.

FINALLY.—There are persons, whose situation in life will not permit them to go into critical inquiries. To read to advantage, they ought, therefore, to search that part of the inspired volume, which teaches them how they should behave to God and their neighbour; with what temper they should receive both injuries and favours: how they should demean themselves in prosperity and adversity: and what they may hereafter expect, if they fear God, believe on Jesus Christ, follow his example, and obey his laws. The rules of the gospel, and the hope there set before us, are of infinitely more importance than any mere speculation. It is for this reason, therefore, that practical Christianity is recommended to those, who have not time to look into all mysteries, and all knowledge.

2. HAVING thus proposed rules for searching the scriptures, I proceed, secondly, to the probable result of our inquiries. And, let me observe, the most extensive acquaintance with the word of God will not render a man a great natural philosopher, or politician; will not qualify him to make laws, or to lead armies; will not give him a superiority over others in regard to the acquisition of wealth, or the pursuits of ambition. I mention this, because some have imagined, that every species of information may be obtained from the sacred books. There are persons, who have pretended to find a complete system of astronomy in the writings of Moses. Others have discovered in them

them the science of medicine, anatomy, agriculture, and the mechanic arts. Sometimes, the scriptures have been brought to prove, and at other times, to contradict the received philosophy of the age. But the real fact is, neither the revelation of Moses, nor that of Jesus, pretend to throw light on these subjects. They were not published with any such view. The design of the former was to enlighten, and reform the Jews; and that of the latter, to put an end to the superstition and wickedness of mankind at large. Consequently, a man may be mighty in the scriptures without being a proficient in human knowledge.

AGAIN—Though we search the scriptures agreeably to the rules here laid down, it is not to be expected, that we should obtain a clear idea of every particular contained in them. The sacred volume comprehends a variety of subjects. Some parts of it are historical, some poetical, some devotional, some practical, and some prophetical. Sometimes, we receive instruction in plain terms; at other times, in parables. Now, an allegory, and now a dialogue, is made the vehicle of divine truth. Besides, the books, which form the sacred collection, were composed at different times, and under very different dispensations. Nothing can be more unlike, than the political and religious circumstances of mankind, when the several books were published. Consequently, a degree of obscurity might be expected. Nor can this be any objection to the sacred origin ascribed to the Jewish and Christian scriptures. In the books of nature and providence, we find things hard to be understood. But from hence we do not infer, that God was not their author. How absurd would it be to deny his agency, because we cannot ascertain the use or final cause of some productions?

productions? And how impious to maintain, that the course of events cannot be under his direction, because his "judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out?" But upon the same principles, on which we should condemn such conduct, we must condemn a rejection of the scriptures, because we cannot comprehend every passage. Many books are a history of events already passed: and many a prediction of events to come. If, therefore, the events themselves might, in many respects, exceed our comprehension, I see not, why a written account of them may not partake of their obscurity.

ADMITTING, then, that human learning will not reward our inquiries; and that, after a most diligent attention to the word of God, we may not be able to explain it in all its parts, the question will be urged, to what purpose are the scriptures recommended to our perusal? What profit shall we have, if we study them with diligence and impartiality? I answer, by complying with the admonition of our Saviour, our natural apprehensions of God will be confirmed: and we shall, moreover, have such views of him, as will powerfully tend to command our homage, love, and obedience. The sacred books display the supreme being in a most glorious, but still in an amiable light. They teach us to consider him as our maker, father, and governor. They assert his over-ruling providence, and furnish reasons for a perfect confidence in his administrations.

THEY, moreover, instruct us in all the important branches of moral duty. They prescribe rules for the parent and child, master and servant, prince and subject, rich and poor, prosperous and miserable. They point out our duty to God, and to ourselves. And they set before us, examples of the most exalted virtue.

virtue. When we have done wrong, they teach us how to repair the error: and furnish unanswerable reasons in favour of repentance and reformation.

THEY likewise bring to view, a future state, in which that moral government, which is begun in this world, will be carried to perfection. They give us full assurance of a resurrection from the grave. They set before us, a tribunal, before which the whole human kind will appear: and a judge, from whose lips they will receive their sentence. And they reveal to us, a state, in which glory, honour, and immortality will attend the righteous: and indignation and wrath, the workers of iniquity.

FINALLY—The scriptures exhibit a plain account of the ruin of mankind, and the measures taken for their recovery. They describe the first act of disobedience, and its judicial consequences. They show the progress of moral evil, and the temporal judgments, which pursued the aggressors. They display the origin and adventures of an extraordinary people, whom God selected from the mass of mankind, to be the repositories of the true religion, at a time, when darkness overspread all other nations of the earth. They show how all things conspired to prepare the way for the Messiah. And they relate all the particulars of his human parentage, his labours, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his exaltation, and his appointment to raise the dead, and judge the world. Finally, they make us acquainted with the excellencies, which adorned his character, and the salvation purchased by his blood.

THESE remarks will furnish a sufficient answer to the inquiry, whether the information, derived from the scriptures, will be an adequate reward for the labour of searching them. What can be more interesting

interesting to us, than right views of God, and his providence? What more animating, than the certainty, that his eye is ever on us, and that he orders every circumstance of our lives? What more important to us, than rules of conduct, suited to every relation, which we may sustain; and any condition, in which the providence of God may place us? What privilege superior to that of having before us, the best of examples, and the best of motives? What discovery to be compared with that of a future state, a state of retribution; a state, in which the effects of a righteous government will be universally felt? In short, what communication of such moment to us, as the certainty of forgiveness if we repent, and salvation if we believe and obey; the certainty, that we shall be roused from the slumbers of death; that our virtues, if we persevere, and our vices, if we continue unreformed, will follow us to another world; and that every man will receive according to his works! I can form an idea of no communications more interesting than these. These appear to me to be the subjects, which concern every reasonable being. The scriptures, therefore, throwing light upon these subjects, must amply reward those, who diligently search them.

I CANNOT, then, but recommend the direction of our blessed Saviour to your immediate attention. "Search the scriptures." With good and honest hearts, examine the facts contained in them. Take particular notice of the various measures, which the blessed God has employed, in order to render his creatures virtuous and happy. Consider the rewards bestowed, and the punishments inflicted, in the present state. Consider the precepts, prohibitions, exhortations, promises, and threatenings, contained in the-

the gospel. Consider the character of Jesus Christ, as it is there drawn, and the salvation there revealed. Above all, consider those parts of the sacred volume, which prescribe your duty, and represent your future reward. In so doing, you will verify those words of David, "Blessed is the man, who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of God, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." The sacred student must acquire that wisdom, which will be his glory in this world, and a source of blessedness hereafter. To religious studies, we may apply those words of the eloquent Roman: "They afford nourishment to our youth, delight our old age, adorn prosperity, supply a refuge to adversity, are a constant source of pleasure at home, and no impediment abroad; they cheer us in the night season, and sweeten our retirements." So entertaining and instructive is the word of God, that he, who is best acquainted with it, will be most ready to exclaim, "O, how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day. It is a lamp to my feet, and a light unto my path. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever. They are the rejoicing of my heart."

is the father of all intelligent beings, whatever globe they inhabit; whatever sphere be assigned them. As an ancient poet said, "we are all his offspring," and it is his will and pleasure that we should both contemplate and imitate him as our father in heaven. Is your aim, upon what principle we claim a filial relation to him? Reason and the gospel furnish a ready answer. He is our father by creation; for it was he who made us, and not we ourselves. Our of the dust of the earth he formed our bodies by his almighty

Sermon

Sermon XII.

On the Impartiality of God.

I PETER I. 17.

"AND IF YE CALL ON THE FATHER, WHO, WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS, JUDGETH ACCORDING TO EVERY MAN'S WORK, PASS THE TIME OF YOUR SOJOURNING HERE IN FEAR."

THESE words contain many important truths: without farther introduction, I shall consider them in their order. And in the first place, they introduce the supreme being in the endearing character of a parent. And in this relation he stands to all his creatures. He is the common father of angels and men. He is the father of Jews and Gentiles, of Mahometans and Christians. He is the father of all the varying sects that profess the religion of his son. He is the father of all ranks and conditions of men, whether high or low, rich or poor. In one word, he is the father of all intelligent beings, whatever globes they inhabit; whatever sphere be assigned them. As an ancient poet said, "we are all his offspring"; and it is his will and pleasure that we should both contemplate and invoke him as our father in heaven.

If you ask, upon what principle we claim a filial relation to him? Reason and the gospel furnish a ready answer. He is our father by creation; for it is he that made us, and not we ourselves. Out of the dust of the earth he formed our bodies by his almighty

mighty power; and his inspiration gave us understanding. To God we are absolutely indebted for the gift of existence. Our powers, both bodily and mental, are derived from him; and our circumstances in life are his wise appointment. As the author of our being, God is therefore our parent, and it is highly fit and proper we should regard him in this endearing light.

BUT farther—God is our constant preserver and benefactor; and this is an additional reason for the title bestowed on him in the text. There is not a mercy we enjoy, of which he is not the proper source. It is he that feeds and clothes us. Our eyes wait upon him, and he gives us our meat in due season. When sick, it is he who restores us to health; when depressed, it is God who revives our spirits. His almighty arm is our protection in time of danger; and every good thing we call our own, is the fruit of his bounty. Name the blessing which sweetens human life, and it may be traced up to his munificence. If creation, therefore, would authorize us to call him father, how is the relation strengthened, when we take into consideration his preserving care and goodness!

BUT still, the most striking evidence of his parental affection, is the gift of his son; and the most solid ground, upon which this relation stands, is the gracious display he has made of himself in the gospel. From the sacred volume we learn, that as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord is disposed to have compassion on us; that he sent Jesus Christ to restore us to favour: that the doors of heaven are now set open; and that whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely.

CONSIDERING these things, is there not singular propriety

propriety in the language of the apostle? In every view, is not God a father to the human kind? Can any thing be more reasonable than to call on him as our common parent, when life, breath, and every enjoyment are the fruits of his bounty? Must we not contemplate a father, in our creator and preserver? Must we not discover more than a father in the God of our salvation? If our hopes as Christians have any foundation, the idea of parent is the most natural we can form of the author of all mercies.

BUT secondly—It is not enough that we accustom ourselves to contemplate him under this character; it is our duty as Christians to call on him as our father, esteeming it our honour and privilege that we may invoke him by this name. This is taken for granted by the apostle. "If, says he, ye call on the Father." St. Peter did not express himself in this language, because he entertained a suspicion of *their* piety, to whom his epistle was addressed: he knew the practice of invoking the Father was universal at that age. Our Lord left particular directions relative to the duty of prayer. He exhorted his followers to pray always; and he set the example. Nor was this all; he pointed out the supreme being as the only proper object of religious worship; and furnished a form of prayer, which, for its simplicity and propriety, cannot be too much extolled. Attracted by his example, the primitive Christians never failed to call on the Father. They invoked the God of heaven both in public and private. Every Lord's-day they assembled for the purposes of devotion. And we have the utmost reason to think their families, and places of retirement, were the constant witnesses of their piety.

THEIR example should be a rule for us. How far

we have departed from it, is a truth too well known by every Christian in this assembly. Numbers, who acknowledge the authority of the gospel, pay no regard to its injunctions relative to this duty. Few comparatively call on the Father, either in the circle of their friends, or in a more retired place. It is not fashionable to be devout. Hence many are ashamed of the offices of piety; and observe them no farther than decency requires.

“If I be a father, where is my honour?” Where are those tokens of respect, which are due to me, if I stand in this relation to my creatures? Put this question to your own souls, you who never raise your eyes or voices to the God of heaven. You, who restrain prayer, and extinguish every sentiment of gratitude and affection, endeavour to reconcile your conduct to the feelings and relation of children. There cannot be a more obvious truth, than the obligation we are all under, of approaching God in the name of Jesus Christ. His father we should invoke as our father, his God as our God. When we rise in the morning, we should thank him for his mercies, and implore their continuance. When we retire to rest, we should commend ourselves to his fatherly care. God should be in all our thoughts, when we assemble with our fellow-Christians. At all times, and on all occasions, we should feel disposed to call on the Father, with the confidence of children, but with the humility which becomes creatures so inferior as we are, and so guilty. Thus devout were the followers of Jesus, in the early age of Christianity. And how would such devotion enrich and adorn our religious character?

HAVING spoken of the Father, and the homage he universally received, the apostle proceeds to his strict impartiality.

impartiality. "Who without respect of persons." It is one of the first truths of natural religion, that the common parent of mankind is invariably just, both in the sentiments he entertains relative to his creatures, and in the measure of his conduct towards them. He does not love one, and abhor another, without being able to assign a reason. There is no partiality with him. Leaving their moral conduct out of the question, all the children of men stand on the same footing. The most despised and miserable wretch on earth, is as dear to him as the highest potentate. He knows none of those distinctions, which are the offspring of human pride. With the same eye he regards the prince and the beggar, the master and the servant, the priest and the people. With equal eye he beholds all the dwellers on the earth. Of one blood having made all nations that inhabit the globe, he surveys them as one common parent, ready to accept all who fear him, and work righteousness, whatever be their country, their complexion, their climate, their form of government, or their advantages for acquiring a knowledge of their duty. God is incapable of partiality. We think he must enter into all our narrow prejudices; but we greatly dishonour him when we suppose any such thing.

In the sacred writings, the point now under consideration is particularly maintained. All partiality, prejudices of every kind, are there infinitely removed from the character of God. This is the language both of the old testament and the new: "There is no respect of persons with him." Instances are numerous, where this honourable testimony is borne to the divine character. Thus we read in the book of Chronicles: "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts"; and

and the same truth is repeated in the epistle to the Ephesians: "Knowing that your master is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him." And again, Colossians; "He that doeth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons." Many other instances might be produced, but it is unnecessary: every one knows that partiality is a weakness, and therefore cannot, without great injustice, be ascribed to God.

TRUE it is, the supreme being expresses a particular regard for some of his creatures. Some, in his infinite wisdom, he evidently prefers to others; but this preference arises solely from moral considerations. The man of piety and virtue, the man who fears him, honours his son Jesus Christ, and conforms his temper and life to the gospel, is in high favour with the blessed God. As the scripture expresses it, his eye is continually upon the righteous; and his countenance beholdeth the upright. On the other hand, his face is set against them, who do evil: the unjust, the impious, and the profane man, is the object of his detestation. But this argues no partiality: it is proper, and agreeable to the nature of things, that God should love his own image, wherever it appears; and justice demands that he condemn and stigmatize vice, whether in man or a superior being. Admitting, therefore, that all do not enjoy the same degree of favour with the Almighty, it will not follow that there is respect of persons with him.

THE apostle proceeds—"Judgeth according to every man's work." The divine impartiality is now apparent; but it will be still more so at the great day. When all nations shall appear before his tribunal, then will they receive according to the deeds done

done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil. God will not condemn or acquit upon such grounds, as would perhaps influence a human sentence. At that great and solemn day, it will not be inquired what religious opinions a man held, in what manner he worshipped God, to what particular denomination of Christians he belonged, but how he discharged his duty towards God, and towards man. The supreme judge will approve no one, merely because he happened to be born of christian parents, or drew his first breath in a christian country. Nor will he condemn any one, because he did not come into the world under the same advantages. To the Jew, it will never be imputed as a fault that he was born of unbelieving parents; nor to the Gentile, that he was educated in the grossest superstition. Their veneration for an impious impostor will never be charged as a crime upon those, who had the misfortune to be born Mahometans. Nor will the papist fare the worse for honestly believing the Romish religion. God orders the circumstances of our birth and education; and I appeal to any man, whether it would not be hard that a person should be condemned for what he could not possibly prevent. We are Christians; but had we been born in other parts of the world, we should have entertained very different opinions. Had some part of Asia been the place of our nativity, the presumption is, we should have been professed Mahometans. Had we been born in the wilds of our own country, we should have been Pagans. And our religion would have been that of the church of Rome, had we drawn our first breath, or received our education, in a catholic country. From these considerations it must be evident, that God will observe some other rule of judging than the

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the mere circumstances of our birth, or the religious opinions, which are first instilled into our minds.

I HAVE been more particular upon this subject, because we are so apt to judge and condemn each other for thinking differently on points of religion. It is a fact that we do differ in sentiment; and it is no less certain, that this difference has given occasion to many hard thoughts, and uncharitable censures. Those, who embraced one opinion, have extinguished all charity for those, who dissented from them; and they, in their turn, have been equally severe. Thus has the cause of real religion suffered, and God himself been made a party in our senseless disputes.

BUT of this we may be certain, that "he will judge every man according to his works." No Christian will be condemned for thinking wrong; but he certainly will for acting contrary to the gospel. An error in speculation does not imply a wicked heart: nor does it follow, that a man will adorn the religion of Jesus, because he happens to have just and rational sentiments of that religion. The head is one thing, and the heart another; and God looketh at the heart. The great point with him, and what will finally determine our sentence, is the moral state of our minds, and the course of action we have pursued under the light and advantages bestowed upon us.

REMEMBER then, my fellow-christians, the approaching judgment of the great day. Remember who will be your judge; that God, with whom is no respect of persons. And bear in mind his equitable rule of judging, and the grounds upon which he will approve or condemn; punish or reward. If you have *done* well, you will certainly be accepted, though possibly you may have thought wrong. If you have
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done ill, you will be condemned, though possibly you may have thought right. Your practice will determine your fate. As you have lived in this world, so will you be happy or miserable in the state approaching. If you have loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and endeavoured, according to your best knowledge, to obey his commands, you will share his glory and happiness. If, on the other hand, you have openly and habitually violated your duty, you will be cast into outer darkness, and be as miserable as you are guilty. In the former case, it will not be objected against you, that with the truths of the gospel, you embraced some errors; nor, in the latter, will it avail you to say your faith was pure, while your practice was notoriously corrupt.

OUR practice, my hearers, is every thing with that being, who judgeth righteous judgment. The external circumstances of our lives are of little consequence; but it is of the last moment, that the lives we live in the flesh, be according to the gospel. Better were it to be a sober Heathen, than a wicked Christian. They, who have sinned under the light of the gospel, will be severely punished; their guilt is beyond measure increased by their superior knowledge. It becomes us, therefore, to pay a particular attention to our practice; for if we adorn the gospel by our lives, we have reason to expect ineffable felicity; if we do not, an aggravated condemnation.

THE apostle concludes—"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Life is a journey; and we are all pilgrims and strangers. Here we have no abiding place, but look for one, which is to come. The present life may be justly styled the infancy of our being, a mere prelude to existence. We are born into the world, rapidly we increase to manhood,

hood, old age soon overtakes us; we return to the dust, in a moment we are forgotten. This fact has led many to speak of human life in very humiliating terms. The psalmist says, "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." The same mortifying truth he repeats on another occasion: "We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." Of all the similitudes under which life is represented, none is more striking than that of a journey. We do travel on from the cradle to the grave. When wearied, we sit down and refresh ourselves; and to vary our journey, we now and then drop a flower as we pass along. But still we are travellers, and can expect no very comfortable accommodation, till we arrive at our native home. Heaven is that home; and happy for us, if we have made any considerable advances towards it.

Such being our present state, and future destination, the admonition of the apostle comes with peculiar force: "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." This naturally follows from the consideration, that God will judge the world; and that he will punish or reward according to our works. Had he any other rule of judging, we might possibly have reason for confidence. Had he revealed it by his son, that our religious opinions, the sect we belong to, or any thing short of faith, repentance, and a holy life, would be the ground of his approbation, there would be no occasion for distrust, or any doubts respecting our moral state. Every man could tell whether he held particular doctrines, whether he was a papist or a protestant, a church-man, or a dissenter. But when the general tenor of his life is

seriously

seriously examined, it is not so easy to obtain satisfaction. The best man will perceive, that in so many things he offends; that in so many respects the temper of his mind is unlike to that of Jesus Christ; that in so many instances he is unconformed to the gospel, that he must have many tormenting suspicions, whether he be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

HENCE the propriety of this admonition: "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Do not presume upon the absolute safety of your spiritual state. Do not imagine you have acquired such invincible habits of piety, that it is impossible you should fall. So many have thought before you, but too soon have found their mistake. You live in a world of trial and temptation. You have appetites and passions within, and objects without, suited to their gratification. You are continually liable to fall from your integrity, and forfeit the character you now sustain. Wherefore, "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Live in fear of yourselves, in fear of your own strength and constancy, in fear, lest, though you now "stand, you should soon fall."

THIS I take to be the meaning of the apostle; permit me to enforce the admonition. The time, my brethren, is short; yet a little while, and we must take leave of this world, and all its enjoyments. It cannot be long, before we must return to the dust, and pay that debt which was incurred by the first transgression. But after death comes the judgment. We must all appear before the tribunal of our great judge, and receive according to our works. If, by a patient continuance in well doing, we have sought for glory, honour, and immortality, we shall reap life eternal. If we have been contentious and disobedient,

obedient, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, will be our portion. In pronouncing sentence, the judge will observe the strictest impartiality. He will acknowledge no distinction, but such as we previously make ourselves, by the abuse or improvement of our liberty. Let us, therefore, instantly attend to the business of life, and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. As strangers and sojourners, let us not place our affections on things below: nor suffer any objects to divert us from the course we are pursuing. But forgetting the things which are behind, let us run with patience the race set before us, looking for our reward in the heavenly world. Let our weakness ever dispose us to watch and be sober. Let us fear, lest having begun well, we should not have patience and constancy to persevere. Thus sojourning in fear, we should be prepared to meet our judge, should be entitled to his approving sentence, and be qualified for that superior and never ending felicity, which was prepared for us before the world began.

Sermon XIII.

Christians not of the World.

JOHN XVII. 16.

"THEY ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, EVEN AS I AM NOT OF THE WORLD."

THESE words were uttered by our blessed Saviour, in a solemn prayer, which he addressed to his heavenly father, in behalf of his apostles. The time of his crucifixion drawing nigh, he

could not leave them, without this testimony of his affectionate regards. In a most solemn manner, he, therefore, recommends them to the providential care of the supreme being, intreating that they might be supported under the separation, which was soon to take place; that they might be kept from evil; and that their pious and benevolent labours might be crowned with success. His words are, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." The text follows: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." I shall not detain you with any laboured remarks on this excellent prayer. It is sufficient to say, that nothing could be more expressive of that piety towards God, and that benevolence towards man, which possessed the heart of our divine master.

To explain the words of the text, and to make it a lesson of instruction to ourselves, is my design in the following discourse. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." I shall, first, consider how it is true of our Saviour, that he was not of the world: and, secondly, in what sense the same remark will apply to his followers.

THAT our divine Lord "was not of the world," is a truth, which will be disputed by none, who admit his high pretensions as the Son of God. His origin was celestial; his religion was from above; his conversation was in heaven; and his motives and principles of action were worthy of his sacred character and office. In speaking of himself, he often takes occasion to remark, that he descended from heaven; that he might bear witness of the truth; and

and accomplish the salvation of mankind. In speaking of his doctrines, he takes particular care to inform us, that they were communicated from above; and consequently, were not properly his own, but his who sent him. His commandments he expressly ascribes to the same authority. And, as to his spirit and behaviour, in no instance were they conformed to the taste of the world, or to the principles, which govern those, who seek no other good than human applause. Knowing what is in man, he did not aim to please, but to reform him. And he always seemed to act under this impression, that "the friendship of the world is enmity to God."

HAD our Saviour been of the world, he would have accommodated his doctrines to the corrupt state of the age, in which he appeared. With the Sadducees, he would have denied a future state; and encouraged a life of sinful pleasure. Or, with the pharisees, he would have extolled the tradition of the elders; would have recommended long prayers, and an ostentatious charity; would have countenanced acts of injustice, by some specious fiction; would have furnished arguments for an inveterate hatred or contempt of all, who were not of the Jewish nation, or religion; and would have justified a zeal for rites and forms, not only to the neglect, but at the expense, of common morality. Had our Saviour been of the world, he would have inflamed the seditious and factious spirit of his countrymen; and, it is possible, he might have accepted the crown, when it was offered to him by the multitude. But he had not the views and principles, which sway the great body of mankind. Crowns and sceptres had no charms in his eyes; and riches and honours he could view with a noble indifference. Whilst in
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the world, he could, therefore, rise superior to it ; and he could prosecute the great work of our salvation, without suffering any thing to divert his thoughts from so glorious an undertaking.

So far exalted above the world, no wonder he experienced its envy and hatred. With no other guide, but truth ; with no other rule of action, but the rule of righteousness ; and with no other object, but the glory of God, and the good of mankind, we cannot be surprised at any thing which befel him. How was he to succeed with the world, who was continually exposing its vices ? How was he to succeed with the great, who was always pouring contempt on human greatness ? And how was he to ingratiate himself with the multitude, who was generously endeavouring to set them right in the concerns of religion ; and to expose the wicked arts of those, to whom they had blindly surrendered both their consciences and understandings ? When we consider the manner, in which the Son of God executed his office ; the example which he displayed ; and the principles upon which he acted, we cannot wonder that he finished his life on the cross. Had he been of the world, the world would have heard him. But his life and doctrines being a continual censure of the age, we might rationally conclude, that he would be hated, defamed, persecuted, and that every art would be employed to compass his destruction.

BUT I proceed to inquire, secondly, in what sense it may be said of his followers, that "*THEY are not of the world.*" Of the apostles, this might be said with obvious propriety. They were successors of Jesus Christ, and had received a commission to preach his religion ; and to bear witness to the same truths,
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in defence of which he gave up his life. They were going forth to rebuke the wickedness of mankind; and to act the same unpopular part, which had brought so much odium on their great leader. Jesus Christ had laid the foundation of a pure and heavenly religion, and it was their office to complete the superstructure. If, therefore, Christ was not of the world, neither were they of the world. Being one with him in principle, and in views, the same observation will apply to both.

BUT the question still returns, how far the words of the text are descriptive of Christians in succeeding ages? And to this I answer, not in a sense, which gives the least countenance to superstition, though in one which leaves the observation sufficient importance. To prove, that "we are not of the world," it is not necessary that we should retire from it. From the text, some have drawn this inference; and they have accordingly retreated to deserts; have associated with wild beasts; and have worn out their lives in a manner highly disgraceful to human nature. This particular kind of religious extravagance originated in Egypt. Some wild enthusiasts set the example; and it is astonishing to reflect, how soon it was followed by multitudes, in all parts of the christian world. The monastick institutions originated in this mistaken principle. And enlightened as the age is, yet, in catholic countries, numbers of both sexes retire from society; and suppose that such a measure is absolutely necessary, in order to attain to christian perfection.

BUT they, who are acquainted with the gospel, will acknowledge, that such a recess from the world finds no countenance in the sacred pages. So far from it, Christianity requires, that we live in the world;

world; and that we endeavour to do all the good in our power, as long as God shall continue us on this side the grave. Formed for society, and for action, we have no right to fly from the former, or to neglect the latter. God sent us into the world to enjoy, and to do good; and to encounter those trials and temptations, which infinite wisdom has adjusted to our strength; and which are graciously calculated to advance us to the highest stage of moral perfection. Here, then, we ought to take our station, and to act our part. We should remember, if lost to the world, we must be lost to the great ends of religion. And under this conviction, we should address our heavenly father in the language of his son: "We pray not, that thou wouldest take us out of the world, but that thou wouldest keep us from evil." I would appeal to any man of reflection, whether this is not reasonable? And I would ask the Christian, whether it is not true?

AGAIN—To make it appear, that we are not of the world, it is not necessary that we should absolutely refuse its riches, honours, and pleasures, when they may be obtained without injustice, and enjoyed without injury to any one. The bounty of God has provided many good things for his rational offspring. A Christian, therefore, may surely partake of those good things, in common with others. To enjoy with moderation and with gratitude, is to obey: for it is a sacred truth of our religion, that nothing proceeding from God is to be refused; but that every favour is to be received with thanksgiving. And the same liberty has the Christian, in regard to wealth, power, and fame. He is under no obligation to refuse riches, when they descend to him according to the laws of society; or offer themselves as

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the natural reward of industry and frugality. The gospel does not oblige him to decline an honourable office, when the voice of his country calls him to it; and when he is conscious, that his abilities qualify him for the faithful discharge of its duties. Nor is he bound to turn a deaf ear to human applause; and to regard a good or ill name with perfect indifference. Wealth, in the hands of a Christian, is often an unspeakable blessing to society. Power, when exercised by such a person, is always subservient to the great ends of government: and many advantages result, both to individuals and the community, when the public confidence is not withheld from real merit; and when a good name is judiciously bestowed. It is plain, therefore, that the religion of a Christian does not require an absolute insensibility to those outward good things, which have so many charms in the eyes of others.

FINALLY—To justify the description in the text, it is not expected, that, in matters of indifference, a Christian should affect a severity, or even a singularity of behaviour. It may be truly said of him, that “he is not of the world,” whilst he resembles the men of the world in all points, where duty and conscience are not concerned. In his dress, in his language, and in his manners; as a member of the community, he is under no obligation to deviate from established forms. Our blessed Saviour was habited like the Jews of his day, and spake their language. And though he rejected the religious innovations of the scribes and pharisees; yet it does not appear, that he ever departed from those common forms, which regulated the mutual intercourse of the Jews; and which were, in themselves, indifferent. His followers, then, need not aim at a singularity, which so pure a character

character never affected. They need not study to be unlike others in every thing, because, in the concerns of religion, they are to act independently; and to have no respect to the opinions and practices of an evil world.

HAVING thus shown what is not implied in the words before us, I now proceed to their true import: and, on a variety of accounts, it may be said of Christians universally, that "they are not of the world." In the first place, they do not look for their highest happiness in the present state. Men, who disown all revelation, and imagine that death will put a period to their existence, must expect all their happiness on this side the grave. To such, therefore, the counsel of the wise man would not be unacceptable: "Then I commended mirth; because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour, the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun." This is all his portion, upon supposition, that the present state is final. But if we admit the divine authority of the gospel, and cordially assent to its discoveries respecting futurity, we must have a different view of things; and must act on different principles. And this is the case with every sincere Christian. He considers this state as only preparatory to a better. He regards all its good things as an earnest of future blessings; and all its evils, as a salutary discipline. And for this reason, he does not expect to be put in possession of his chief good, till the present state of trial shall be brought to a close. Here, then, is a very important sense, in which the description in the text will apply to all true Christians. They are not of the world. They do not

not look for their happiness in any thing, which the world can bestow. If favoured with its good things, they receive and enjoy them with gratitude. But still they have far better things in prospect. They expect to partake of pleasures far superior to those of time and sense; pleasures, which will be subject to no interruption; pleasures, which are suited to the nature of a moral, intelligent being; and pleasures, which will never end. Such expectations does the gospel authorize us to entertain. He, therefore, who firmly believes the gospel, and feels its sacred influence, will have a steady regard to the heavenly happiness. And the joy, set before him, will wean him from this world; and will excite him to use the utmost diligence to secure an inheritance, which is "incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away."

SECONDLY—The Christian is not of the world, inasmuch as he does not follow its evil example. It is mortifying to reflect how much wickedness there is in society, notwithstanding the various measures, which God has employed to reform his creatures. What is the history of mankind, but a detail of their vices and miseries? In how great a degree has moral evil abounded, even in those ages, which are esteemed comparatively virtuous? What daring crimes have been committed by the present generation? And what an evident want of principle is there, even in countries, where the means of knowledge and virtue have been most liberally diffused? It is scarcely credible, that the religion and example of Jesus Christ should have less influence on society, than at the present age.

But the Christian, notwithstanding the general prevalence and contagion of vice, will keep himself unspotted

unspotted of the world. He "will not follow the multitude to do evil." Like some of those eminent worthies, which are immortalized in the sacred pages, he will oppose the torrent of corruption; and will shine as a light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Examples of impiety and infidelity will neither shake his faith, nor corrupt his morals. He will not be unjust, because others practise iniquity. He will not be idle, intemperate, and dissolute, though he might have the countenance of the multitude. The vices of others will have no other effect on his mind, than to excite his abhorrence of moral evil; to endear his religion to him; and to confirm his good resolutions. An exception, therefore, to the profligacy of the age, the Christian is certainly not of the world. He does not live as the men of the world generally do. To their example he opposes that of his blessed master. And he so conducts, as to convince others that temptation is resistable; and that evil communications do not necessarily corrupt good manners.

THIRDLY—The observation in the text will receive further illustration from this consideration, that the Christian does not study to please the world, by conforming to its corrupt principles and maxims. He does not inquire what will render him popular; what will give him influence in society; what will make his fortune; or what will be most conducive to his temporal interest or convenience. Fame and honour, power and riches, as I have already observed, he is willing to obtain by honourable means. But he will accept of neither at the expense of innocence. If the objects of human ambition should meet him in the path of religion, he will not probably reject them. But he will not turn either to the right hand
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or the left, to possess himself of any thing, which human favour can bestow.

In this respect, the Christian is very unlike other men. They are willing to follow the dictates of worldly wisdom, without comparing them with the dictates of conscience. Those measures are, with them, perfectly right, which will most effectually accomplish their purposes. But the rules, which govern the Christian, are found not in the world, but in the gospel. They are not the maxims of the politician, but the precepts of Jesus Christ. How justly, then, are his true disciples described, as not of the world, even as he was not of the world? The Son of God never sought the favour of men, by any sinful compliances with their corrupt prejudices, or principles of action. And every one, who professes his religion, should copy his integrity.

LASTLY—It is natural for those, who are Christians in principle, to employ their thoughts on the joys and honours of another state; to make them the subject of their conversation, and the object of their earnest pursuit. Regarding heaven as their home, they feel like pilgrims and strangers on the earth. Consequently, the changes, which take place in society, do not make that impression on their minds, which they do on the minds of others. The revolutions of states and empires they contemplate with christian calmness. And from scenes of folly, confusion, and wickedness, they often look forward to a state, where the vices which disgrace, and the passions which agitate mankind, will be unknown; and where the benign influence of piety and virtue will be universally felt. Thus resigned to the course of things here, and intent on securing the blessings promised hereafter, the Christian may be justly considered “as not of this world.”

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FROM the subject of this discourse, I am naturally led to urge the inquiry, how far the words of our Saviour are applicable to ourselves. It is the case with many present, as well as myself, to have made a public profession of our faith in the christian religion; and to have engaged, in the most solemn manner, to follow its sacred rules. But do we verify our professions by a corresponding course of behaviour? Do we look for our chief good in a future state; or are we willing to have our portion in this world? Do we prefer the pleasures of religion to the pleasures of sense? Are we weaned from the follies and vanities of this world; or, do we feel their influence in the same degree with others; and pursue them with the same ardour? Do we resist, or do we follow the multitude to do evil? What effect have the principles and practices of others on our minds? Are we proof against their pernicious maxims and example; or do we resign ourselves up to their fatal influence, regardless of the credit of our profession, and our eternal welfare? It is our privilege, to have an explicit revelation of a future state. The consequences of our actions we are able to trace far beyond this transitory life; and we are assured, that we shall be rewarded or punished as our works have been. Does this conviction fortify us against the temptations, which are in the world? Are we alarmed at the righteous displeasure of God? And are we delighted with the prospects of glory, honour, and immortality, which are set before us in the gospel? Do all these discoveries, all these promises, all these threatenings, and all these motives, incline us to behave as followers of one, who was from heaven; and as subjects of a "kingdom not of this world"? Judging from our temper and actions, what reply should

should we make to these inquiries? Appealing to our consciences, will they acquit or condemn us?

THE time will soon come, when we must answer for ourselves before the tribunal of God. To be prepared, therefore, for that solemn scene, let us give the most earnest heed to the voice of inspiration, which addresses us in this language: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." To this admonition, let me add that of the apostle, with which I conclude: "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Sermon XIV.

On improving religious Advantages.

MATTHEW XIII. 12.

"FOR WHOSOEVER HATH, TO HIM SHALL BE GIVEN,
AND HE SHALL HAVE MORE ABUNDANCE: BUT
WHOSOEVER HATH NOT, FROM HIM SHALL BE
TAKEN AWAY, EVEN THAT HE HATH."

TO ascertain the true meaning of these words, it is necessary to consider their connexion. Our Lord, to accommodate his hearers, repaired to the
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sea-side : and, attracted by his fame, great multitudes assembled to hear him. But because there were but few among them, who were able to comprehend, or prepared to hear the sublime truths of his religion, he instructed them by parables. That of the husbandman, who went forth to sow, was first uttered and applied. Upon this, his disciples came and said unto him, why speakest thou unto them in parables ? Jesus answered, because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven ; but to them it is not given." The text follows : " For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance ; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." " Therefore, speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not ; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." As if our blessed master had said, you inquire why my private conversations with you are so clear and explicit, when compared with my public discourses. The reason is, you are more disposed to receive my instructions than others ; and can bear truths, which their prejudices would reject. For they, who, with honesty and simplicity, attend to my doctrines ; who treasure them up in their hearts, and endeavour to make them subservient to the purposes of religion and virtue, as you do ; such persons shall have more instruction, and greater advantages continually afforded them. But they, who make no use of that instruction which is given them, and do not improve under the advantages which they already have (as is the case with many of my common hearers) they shall lose the very means of information, with which they are now favoured. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because, seeing the greatest miracles,

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they have not been convinced; and hearing the plainest doctrines, they would not understand.

THE words, thus explained, deserve our serious attention. Indeed, I scarcely know a more important passage of scripture. It reminds us of our privilege and our duty. It shows us what our benevolent creator has done for mankind, and what he expects in return. And whilst it addresses our hopes with the assurance of his approbation and assistance, it alarms our fears with the declaration, that we shall be deprived of the means of growing wiser and better, if those means be ingratefully neglected. As these are considerations of the last moment, they will not be heard with indifference, as further illustrated in the following discourse.

FIRST—Our Saviour observes, “whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.” If we have derived some information from the gospel, and made some progress in religion, with a disposition to improve, we shall go on towards perfection. Studying the sacred writings, we shall discover new evidence of their truth, and have an increasing confidence in their divine inspiration. Having the love of God in some degree, and desiring to experience this affection in all its fervour, we shall eventually “love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength.” Having some devotion, under the influence of the gospel, this principle will gain an ascendancy over others, and we shall bear its fruits in more abundance. Having some respect for the character of Christ, and desiring to feel our obligations still more sensibly, the sentiments of reverence and gratitude will continually acquire strength. Having some knowledge of the truths of religion, and of the
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the things which belong to our peace, we shall receive new accessions of divine wisdom; the light within will shine more and more unto the perfect day. Having made some progress in the christian life, having gained some triumphs over the world, having acquired some virtues, and formed some habits, our lives will become still more conformed to the gospel; and our characters will be enriched with new graces. New victories will proclaim our fortitude, and spread our glory: and new qualifications for immortal happiness will brighten our prospects. Whatever we now have in any given measure, we shall have in abundance, if we endeavour to retain the instructions which we have received, and to make a proper use of our religious advantages. A sincere desire to improve, must terminate in actual improvement. We cannot go backward in religion, whilst we are endeavouring to proceed. Our faith will increase in strength, and our piety in fervour; our knowledge, our benevolence, our purity, our rectitude, our humility; in a word, every virtue, implanted in us, will gain vigour, if we have the simplicity of Christ's early disciples; and endeavour, like them, to become wise to salvation. They had, and to them more was given. And if we have their disposition to listen to the great instructor, and their zeal to profit by the gospel, we shall make the same moral attainments. Our religious principles will have a confirmed influence over our external behaviour. And we shall make daily advances towards the christian standard, in faith and knowledge, in profession and practice.

THAT "whosoever hath, to him shall be given," is an observation often verified in the common concerns of life. It is true in regard to human knowledge,

ledge. The more information we already have, the more we may acquire. Every step in science facilitates our progress. Intent on improving our minds, and diligent in the use of means, we have an increasing acquaintance with every object, which invites our examination. Thus also in regard to temporal riches; treasures already possessed, lay a foundation for still greater acquisitions. With this advantage on its side, industry can scarcely fail of the most ample reward. The observation before us, is likewise true, when applied to human power and glory. They, who, in a certain degree, already exercise the one, and reflect the other, have the means of rising still higher, and of moving in a still more exalted sphere. It is agreeable to the established constitution of things, that they who now have, in any respect, should, by a proper exertion, have more abundance.

BUT, in the important concerns of religion, the divine assistance may be confidently expected, if it be our earnest desire to add new virtues to those which we already possess; and to be still more eminent as Christians. The supreme being will enable us to conform still more habitually to the laws and example of our blessed Saviour. The longer we continue in this state of improvement, the more effectually shall we secure that good part, which cannot be taken from us. That spirit which was communicated to Christ without measure; which enlightened the prophets of old, and the apostles in after times, is promised to those who devoutly ask it of God. And workers together with it, we shall, to use the words of the apostle, "grow in grace," and continually lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come.

IN this manner did the primitive Christians adorn the doctrine of the gospel; and in consequence of this assistance, did they add to their faith virtue, and every good quality, which could recommend their religion. The christian excellencies were in them, and abounded, because they were zealous to improve, and the divine spirit concurred with their exertions. From the language of the apostle, we may learn what they felt, and at what they aimed. "Brethren, (says he) this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." They, who first embraced the gospel, were fully impressed with the progressive nature of religion. For this reason, they endeavoured to subject every thought, word, and action to its influence. And they had the satisfaction to find, that their christian diligence was not ineffectual.

AND imitating their endeavours, we shall have their encouragement to persevere. Employing what we now have to the purposes of religion, we shall have more assistance, and more success. As often as we look within, we shall find some error corrected; some defect supplied; some passion subdued; and some good quality confirmed. As often as we review our lives, we shall perceive their increasing consistency with our professions. And we shall be under no necessity to go beyond ourselves to prove the justness of the remark, which has been the subject of this discourse.

I now go on to observe, secondly, that "whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." That is, they who make no use of
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that instruction which is given to them, and no improvement under the advantages which they now enjoy, so far from expecting more instruction, and greater advantages, may justly apprehend the loss of those, with which God has indulged them; inasmuch as by their ingratitude and neglect, they have incurred the forfeiture. As the well-disposed naturally grow better, so the careless as naturally grow worse. Indifferent to moral improvement, and inattentive to the means, their thoughts will be continually more diverted from the concerns of religion; and their hearts hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. This was the fate of those very people, to whom the text more immediately referred. They had not—that is, a disposition to receive the gospel, and to walk according to its precepts—and, therefore, it was taken from them, and given to the Gentiles. Miracles, sufficient for their conviction, had been resisted. They had shut their eyes against the light, and their ears against the voice of truth. With this temper of mind, what could be expected, but that their religious impressions, if they ever had any, should wear off; and their religious privileges be withdrawn. And in this manner did God resent their perverseness. As a nation, the Jews were suffered to fill up the measure of their iniquity, till they became ripe for destruction. Then were the divine threatenings executed. And then was taken from them even that, which for ages they had enjoyed.

THEIR predecessors having acted a similar part, experienced a similar punishment. When the institutions of Moses had lost their influence on the minds of the ancient people, they were suffered to fall into all the immoralities and superstition of their heathen neighbours.

neighbours. The consequence was, the loss of their temple, the destruction of their city, and the slavery of their persons in a foreign land. The supreme being deprived them of the special privileges, with which he had once honoured them, because those privileges were undervalued: and because the returns of gratitude and obedience were generally withheld. If they had been disposed to receive the instructions of Moses, and to walk in his commandments and ordinances, the blessings of that dispensation would have been ensured to them. They did not lose the means, till they had lost the spirit of their religion.

THE fate of countries, once christian, may likewise be adduced in confirmation of the solemn truth advanced by our Saviour. In Asia were many churches, where the religion of Mahomet is now publicly professed. If you examine the cause of this revolution, you will find it in the text. The Christians of those countries had not the true spirit of their religion, nor did they set a proper value on its means. Their zeal grew cold; and their practice dishonoured their profession. Unworthy of the peculiar blessing of the gospel, it was, therefore, taken from them; and the artful inventions of an impostor usurped its place.

THAT such would be the fate of those churches, is intimated in the book of revelation. John beheld, in vision, their declining zeal and purity, and the consequences which would follow. He, therefore, admonishes them on the subject. Writing to the Ephesians, he says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place,

place, except thou repent." Other churches are afterwards admonished. And judgments, which have since been executed, are repeatedly denounced. To excite these Christians to act in character, they are threatened with the loss of those spiritual blessings, with which they had been favoured through the indulgent providence of God. The admonition was ineffectual; for which reason they were punished with the loss both of their civil and religious privileges; and Mahomet became the instrument of almighty vengeance.

AND from the same causes we may always anticipate the same effects. If we are so thoughtless and ingrateful as to set light by divine revelation, we may expect to lose even that which we now have. Our religion will eventually lose its moral influence, though some of its forms may remain. With a disposition so unfavourable to improvement, we shall go on from one degree of indifference to another, till every sentiment of piety shall be extinguished. It is conceivable, that there may be less devotion, less purity, less sobriety and rectitude, less principle, among those who enjoy the light of revelation, than there appear to be at the present age. And it may be justly apprehended, that such a declension will take place, unless we strengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die. By occasionally neglecting any duty, we soon become insensible to its obligation. Omitting the public and private offices, we finally lose the principle of devotion. Neglecting to consult the oracles of God, we lose the religious knowledge which we had treasured up. And allowing ourselves to be remiss in particular instances, we shall, before we are aware, be of the number of those, who are without God in this world, and without
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any hopes beyond it. Thus, according to the righteous appointment of God, and according to the established constitution of things, do they, who have not a serious desire to improve, lose the good principles, which had been instilled into their minds, and the good habits, which had been formed in their hearts.

SECURE in the enjoyment of the gospel, some may, perhaps, consider this representation as the work of a gloomy imagination: and the inquiry may be urged, who will deprive us of the information, reproof, and correction, which we find in the sacred pages? That the inspired volume will be withdrawn, and Christianity itself abolished, there is no reason to apprehend. But to what purpose have we the means of religion, if indisposed to avail ourselves of them? What is Christianity to us, if we neglect its ordinances, and disobey its commands? There is virtually an end to the system itself, when there is an end to its divine influence. The words before us are, therefore, awfully verified, when we lose the power, though we retain the records of religion.

FROM the subject of this discourse, we are led to inquire, whether, as Christians, we have gained or lost. It has been our privilege to enjoy the light of revelation, and to be instructed in its principles and duties. The character and government of God have been often set before us; we have learned his will; and have known those motives to obedience, which are drawn from a future state. The things pertaining to life and godliness, have been familiar to our minds, ever since they were capable of reflection. It is, therefore, a pertinent inquiry, whether, under the favourable circumstances, in which God has placed us, we have made answerable improvements? Have

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we the satisfaction to perceive, that we have advanced in religion, both as to speculation and practice? Or, have we the mortification to find, that the most rational instructions, the most powerful and convincing arguments, the most earnest exhortations, have been addressed to us in vain?

As we value our privileges, our interest, and our happiness; as we would stand approved to our own consciences, and to him who is greater than our hearts, and who knoweth all things; as we would have peace in the hour of death, and leave this world with the prospect of a better, let us endeavour to abound in the work of the Lord. Let it be our great object, not merely to retain a principle of devotion, but to increase in true piety. Let it be our serious concern, to make the highest possible attainments in righteousness, sobriety, and benevolence. Comparing ourselves with others, we may, perhaps, imagine that we have made considerable progress in the divine life. But comparing the state of our minds, and our general behaviour, with the rules and example of Christ, we shall be sensible of many defects. We shall discover sufficient reason to be dissatisfied with ourselves; and sufficient motives to diligence and perseverance in the christian course.

Be persuaded, therefore, to converse freely with the gospel; and, sensible of your superior advantages, do not fail to avail yourselves of them. For your encouragement, remember the solemn promise in the text. You are assured by one, whose veracity you cannot question, that if you have, and are desirous of more abundance, it will be freely given. Let this promise excite you to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. So will you advance in religion, as you advance in life. So will your character de-
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rive new splendor from the virtues which are in you, and abound. And so will you insure the final approbation of Christ, being changed into his image, and proceeding from glory to glory.



Sermon XV.

On the Necessity of personal Holiness.



HEBREWS XII. 14.

“HOLINESS, WITHOUT WHICH NO MAN CAN SEE THE LORD.”

AMONG the various points, on which Christians are divided, no one has been the subject of greater controversy, than the condition of our acceptance with God, and the enjoyment of life and blessedness in the heavenly kingdom. According to some, nothing more is necessary, in order to salvation, than a bare assent to this plain truth, that Jesus is the Christ. Others tell us, that his death is the great object of a Christian's faith; and that, to see God hereafter, he must believe that Christ died for him in particular. Others maintain, that faith must be productive of good works, in order to render us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. There are others again, who assert, that we are saved already by the rich grace of God; that Christ has believed for us, obeyed for us, repented for us, died for us, suffered the punishment of sin in our behalf; and that, in virtue of a certain inconceivable union with him,

him, we shall all be happy at the day of judgment. Such, indeed, as lived and died in a state of rebellion against God, will be greatly alarmed at the appearance of their judge. They will call on the rocks to fall on them, and the mountains to cover them. But, we are assured, their fears will be groundless; for that their judge will pronounce them as good and faithful servants, as those who thought themselves under obligation to fear him, and keep his commandments, and that they will be as readily admitted to the joy of their Lord. Thus variously have Christians discoursed upon the subject of future blessedness, and the condition upon which that blessedness would be hereafter obtained and enjoyed.

BUT, it appears to me, all this diversity of sentiment has risen from the want of due attention to one point, namely, that a moral, intelligent being must be qualified for happiness before he can be happy. God may be unspeakably and eternally good. The sufferings and death of Christ may be entitled to all that importance, in the great expedient for our salvation, which is generally ascribed to them. And the circumstances of mankind may (as they have been often represented) plead for mercy with groanings which cannot be uttered. Still, however, as men are free agents, something is necessary on their part, in order to their being capable of that happiness, which is suited to their nature, as free and intelligent beings. If you ask, what that prerequisite is, I answer, personal holiness. For we read in the text, (and the sentiment frequently occurs in other parts of scripture) that "without holiness no man can see the Lord."

UPON this point I shall insist in the following discourse; and shall, before I conclude, take notice of the

the several consequences, which may be deduced from this doctrine.

The principle, advanced in the text, is the absolute necessity of holy and virtuous habits, in order to a capacity for seeing and enjoying God, and being immortally happy in the kingdom of heaven. It is generally supposed, that God has enacted certain laws, as a test of our obedience : that these laws are enforced by proper sanctions : and that future happiness and misery are the positive appointment of God, the one being a reward annexed to obedience, the other a punishment inflicted on disobedience. Such are the ideas generally formed respecting this subject : nor can it be thought strange, when the phraseology of the scripture, the language of civil government, and that parental authority, which we experience in early life, unitedly confirm these conceptions of the divine administrations. But, if we seriously examine the subject, we shall find, that the laws of God are not mere tests of our obedience ; nor the happiness of heaven a merely positive appointment. The divine laws, especially those of the christian dispensation, are chiefly declarations of the natural and necessary effects of certain actions ; and these necessary effects are the real sanction of those laws. According to the established constitution of nature, some things will do us good, and some will injure us. It is found, by experience, that temperance in our animal gratifications will produce very desirable effects, both in regard to our body, mind, and outward estate. By the same experience, it is also found, that exorbitant desires, if freely gratified, will be followed by misery and ruin. And why may there not be the same connexion between the habits formed here, and our condition hereafter ? Why
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may not heaven be the necessary consequence of holiness and evangelical obedience? And why may not the misery denounced in the gospel be the natural fruit of a disordered state of mind, of evil affections, irregular and perverse habits? Is it not reasonable to suppose that our future condition will be good or bad, according to certain fixed laws of nature? The poet has said, and I firmly believe the sentiment,

“The mind is in its own place, and in itself,

“Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

It is beyond all dispute clear in my mind, that heaven is the natural effect of a religious life. The joys and raptures, which are to rise up in the soul, and prevail through eternal ages, must be the divine fruit of confirmed good habits. These are the heavenly seed, from whence will grow up pleasures without alloy, and bliss that will never end. We are at present like plants in a nursery; and when fit for it, we shall be transplanted to the paradise of God. But we must grow, our state must be firm and healthy, before such a distinguished honour will be conferred upon us.

BUT as our future heaven, so will our expected hell be of our own making. Vice and misery are as closely connected as virtue and happiness. Certain practices will necessarily produce those tremendous evils, which are represented as the future portion of the wicked. As obviously as bodily pains are the consequences of intemperance; poverty of dissipation, or death of a dose of poison, so obviously and naturally will future tribulation and anguish be the result of an ill-spent life. Vice is the seed of misery. And in proportion as it prevails in the soul, will be its dreadful fruits hereafter. Hence we may

may be said, in every wicked action, to be sowing one seed of future wretchedness. And if those actions multiply, what can we expect, but such a series of calamities as no human tongue can describe.

WERE heaven a place, rather than a particular state of mind, it would still follow, that a wicked man must be miserable. What satisfaction could a spiritual enjoyment afford to a sensual mind? "What," says an ingenious writer, "what delight would it be to the swine to be wrapt in fine linen, and laid in odours? His senses are not gratified by any such delicacies, nor would he feel any thing beside the torment of being withheld from the mire. And as little complacency would a brutish soul find in those purer and refined pleasures, which can only upbraid, not satisfy him. So that could we, by an impossible supposition, fancy such an one assumed to those fruitions, his pleasure surely would be as little as his preparation for it was. Those eyes, which have continually beheld vanity, would be dazzled, not delighted with the beatific vision; neither could that tongue, which had accustomed itself only to oaths and blasphemies, find harmony or music in hallelujahs. It is the peculiar privilege of the pure in heart that they shall see God. And if any others could so invade this their inclosure, as to take heaven by violence, it surely would be a joyless possession to these men, and only place them in a condition to which they have the greatest aversion. So that holiness is necessary, not only to put us in possession, but also to render us capable of future bliss."

ADMITTING the truth of these observations, (and I see not how it can be called in question) the doctrine in the text will be incontestably established.

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“Without holiness, no man can see the Lord.” That is, unless a man be capable of enjoying the delights of heaven, he must not expect an admission to that state of blessedness. If his nature be depraved and degraded, he must anticipate the natural consequence of moral disorder. There can be no heaven to a being, who has unfitted himself for those immaterial felicities, which constitute the reward of virtue. But if we have wisely improved our moral powers; if, under the influence of the gospel, we have become good Christians, heaven, with all its joys, will grow out of our obedience. We must be happy in the same degree in which we are holy. And if our path shine brighter and brighter, our blessedness will be improving through all eternity.

HAVING thus considered the doctrine in the text, I shall endeavour to show, first, what does not, then, what does follow by natural consequence. And, in regard to the former, you will take particular notice, that the established connexion between holiness and happiness does not militate with the great evangelical doctrine of salvation by grace. Some may be ready to say, if habits of virtue must be formed before we can see the Lord, and if our future bliss will be the natural fruit of our present obedience, does not this render our salvation the reward of our good works? Upon this supposition, do we not purchase heaven? Is not the reward of debt, and the death of Christ a vain thing? I answer, *no*. God forbid that such a conclusion should be drawn from any thing advanced upon the nature of christian holiness, and its connexion with our salvation. The truth is, our existence, our rational and moral powers, our capacity for religion, the means which God has afforded to aid us in becoming religious, a resurrection from the grave,
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and the provision made for our eternal welfare, are all to be ascribed to the rich, unmerited grace of God. The author of our being was under no obligation to make us. He was under no obligation to render us superior to the beasts of the field, or the fowls of heaven. When formed with a capacity for a religion, God was not obliged in justice to send his son to instruct us, to die for us, and much less, to bring life and immortality to light. No perfection in the divine nature demanded of God our continuance beyond this life. Had God, for the first sin, cut us off; had he left all mankind to perish forever in the grave, he had done them no wrong. Even after a life of the most exemplary obedience, independent of the divine promise, we have no just claim of any reward. Is it not, therefore, of grace, that, upon any condition, we may hope to see God? Is it not of grace, that a saviour was provided to instruct us, and die for us? Is not our resurrection the effect of grace? And may we not ascribe it wholly to the rich grace and overflowing bounty of God, that the consequences of holiness are extended beyond this state; and that the habits, here acquired, may be to us a source of joy, unspeakable and full of glory! Surely, grace appears in every step: and it will remain an eternal truth, that by grace are we saved through Christ, notwithstanding purity of heart, and holiness of life, may be a pre-requisite to our seeing God. You will not, therefore, from any thing said, undervalue the grace of God, or suppose the everlasting joys of heaven no more than an adequate reward of your obedience. For it is very conceivable, that holiness should qualify us for heaven, without being the meritorious ground of our salvation.

HAVING shown what does not, I shall now endeavour

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our to show what *does* follow, by necessary consequence, from the point I have undertaken to establish. And, first, if *without holiness no man can see the Lord*, it is evident, that faith, unattended with works, will not justify us at a future day. A cold assent to the gospel can be of no possible advantage. The devils believe, yet we do not find that it mitigates their sufferings: nor will it soften our future doom, unless our faith work by love, purify the heart, and produce habits of evangelical goodness. The reason why we are commanded to believe, is, that we may have within us a constant spring of virtuous action. Good works are the proper fruit of a cordial assent to the gospel. These works, often repeated, terminate in habits of holiness: and holiness, we have already seen, qualifies us for the kingdom and joys of heaven. It follows, therefore, that a dead, inoperative faith, will lay no foundation for the life and happiness to come. Though every article of Christianity be admitted as an undeniable truth, yet this will profit us nothing, unless by works our faith be made perfect.

SECONDLY.—We learn from the subject, to which we have been attending, not only the inefficacy of a dead faith, but also the insufficiency of repentance, considered as a simple act. Many persons, who now live in sin, expect to repent before they die. They flatter themselves, that they shall have so much warning of their approaching dissolution, as to have time to ask forgiveness, and to express their extreme sorrow for what they have done. Upon this presumption, they go on adding iniquity to transgression: and though their whole lives be a course of opposition to the law and authority of God, yet they dread no condemnation, provided they be not denied the privilege of a death-bed repentance. BUT

BUT if *without holiness no man can see the Lord*, these persons will find themselves miserably deluded. Repentance is of consequence no farther than as it produces reformation. "The wicked man, when he turns from the wickedness which he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, will save his soul alive." But no such consequence will follow, unless there be fruits meet for repentance. It is the moral effect of godly sorrow upon our temper and actions, that renders it a subject of evangelical exhortation. If repentance be productive of newness of life, and new obedience, then it will insure the divine forgiveness: but if we live without God, and walk according to the course of this world, till upon the verge of eternity, we may rely, that God will not be appeased by a mere profession of sorrow. At such an awful moment, sorrow is an act of necessity: it cannot, therefore, either entitle us to happiness, or qualify us for it.

THIRDLY—From the doctrine in the text, we learn also the insufficiency of prayer, the study of God's holy word, an attendance on the communion, and all other religious observances, when ultimately relied on, as complete discharge of our duty. There are persons in the world, who, if they have observed the stated times of prayer, think they have done all required of them. The mere labour of the lips comprehends their whole system of religious duty. Others read a portion of scripture morning and evening, and there ends their religion. Others go to the communion, but they consider it as a charm; or, to say the least, its moral effects upon the heart and life never enter their thoughts at the time of its celebration. They think they have done all required of them, if they have received the elements after the customary

customary manner. If we go out of our own church, we shall find instances of far greater extravagance. Some, in order to see God, renounce all commerce with the world, and retire to a religious house, where they may devote themselves wholly to the offices of piety. Others wander in deserts, refusing all habitation but a cave, all associates but the beasts of the earth. Others afflict their bodies for the good of the soul. Others undertake a distant and dangerous pilgrimage, presuming that a visit to the tomb of Christ will expiate a life of iniquity. Others, again, devote their substance to the church, and pay particular homage to the priesthood; in these acts consists their religion, and they confidently expect its eternal rewards. It would be endless to recount the various acts, upon which men rely, as the great work to be done by them, and the sole condition of salvation.

But the truth is, no one outward performance will fit us for heaven, unless it purifies the heart, improves the temper, and reforms the practice. Prayer, for instance, in order to answer the great end of its institution, must not be a mere labour of the lips; but must produce in us, all holy desires and affections, and must be followed with the entire consecration of our whole spirit, soul, and body, to the service of God. We must study the scriptures, with a view to become wiser and better. We must attend the communion, with a pious concern to honour Christ, and to be quickened in our duty to him. In short, we must consider our duty performed, not when we rise from prayer, nor when we close our bible; not when we retire from the Lord's table; not when we leave the church; but when these means of grace have made us partakers of the divine holiness.

holiness. For, after all, in whatever other qualities we may excel, whatever other attainments we may make, *without holiness no man can see the Lord.*

LET us then, first of all, labour for those righteous and godly habits, which are so indispensably necessary to fit us for heaven. Let us not dream of immortal happiness, till we are capable of enjoying it. Let us not say, the close of life will suffice for the concerns of religion and futurity; for, be assured, the longest life is not too long for the acquisition of those virtues and graces, which are the seed of heavenly bliss. Favoured with the means of grace, let us thankfully and diligently improve them. Let us be instant in prayer, attentive to the inspired oracles; let us wait upon God in his house, and appear as guests at his table; and let us do all with a view to our improvement in grace and holiness. Finally—Having done our best, let us rely upon the grace of God, through Christ, for our eternal salvation. Let us remember, that we cannot claim the joys of heaven as our deserved reward. We are unprofitable servants. But God is all love. Out of mercy he sent his son into the world. And from him we learn, that “blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.”

and thus be holier and more
testimonies of our whole spirit, soul, and body, to the
glory of God. We must study the scriptures with
care to become wiser and better. We must attend
the communion with concern to honour
Christ, and to be distinguished in our duty to him.
In short, we must consider our duty performed, not
when we sit down to pray, nor when we close our
books, nor when we retire from the Lord's table;
not when we leave the church; but when there
is grace have made us partakers of the divine
holiness.

Sermon

Sermon XVI.

On public Worship.

PSALM LXXXIV. part of 4 and 10 vs.

"BLESS'D ARE THEY THAT DWELL IN THY HOUSE
—A DAY IN THY COURTS IS BETTER THAN A
THOUSAND."

HAPPY would it be for the cause and interests of religion, if its professors were more generally warined with that pure devotion, which inspired the author of this psalm. David could say, "I have loved the habitation of thy house, the place where thine honour dwelleth." He could declare, with the truest sincerity, that some of his happiest moments were those, which had been employed in the worship of God. He could lay his hand on his heart, and say, that "he had rather be a door-keeper in the house of his God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

How unlike his, are the sentiments of many at this present day? So far from taking a pleasure in the public offices of religion, it is manifest, they esteem them an insupportable burden. So far from loving the habitation of God's house, it is the place of their aversion. This I infer from their absention themselves from this place of worship, whenever the season of the year, the state of the weather, or their own state of health, will furnish even the shadow of an excuse. Did they experience the sacred fervours of genuine devotion, it is impossible that they should

so seldom attend its public offices. — A cold, a hot, or a lowering day, would not confine them to their houses, if their hearts were properly disposed towards God and religion.

As to those, who labour under the weight of years, they have a sufficient excuse for occasional absence. The really infirm may likewise excuse it to their consciences, if they do not make their appearance in public every Lord's-day. And a sufficient plea may be formed for those, who have the charge of young children. Persons of the above description cannot, with any convenience, repair to the house of God, as often as its doors are set open.

But what shall be said of those, who have neither age, sickness, nor domestic cares, to prevent their attendance on public worship? What excuse can they make to society, for violating one of its most useful regulations? What excuse can they make to their fellow-christians, for slighting their society? What excuse can they make to their children and servants, for conducting in a manner so contrary to the line of behaviour marked out for them? And what excuse can they make to that God, who hath claimed both the private and public homage of his creatures? I now address myself, not to the ignorant and thoughtless, but to persons of understanding and reflection. And I ask, in the spirit of christian meekness and love, how they can reconcile their conduct with a sense of duty; and by what means they will repair the mischiefs produced by their example?

No habit is sooner formed, than that against which I am now endeavouring to awaken your zeal. A very few unnecessary absences from the house of God, will be sufficient to estrange a man from that sacred place. Every time he stays at home, the more
averse

averse he will be to appear abroad. Many, who have fallen into this habit, have assured me, that it stole upon them insensibly. Before they were aware, a settled indisposition to public worship had grown up in their hearts : and, at length, they have wanted resolution to encounter the eyes of a christian assembly, which, they justly supposed, would be turned upon them. Thus have many described the formation and progress of this habit ; and have sincerely lamented their folly, in not opposing it in its first stages.

As the season is now approaching, in which too many indulge themselves in a neglect of social worship, I thought it would not be amiss to address you on the subject. The words of the text will furnish some useful reflections ; and I promise myself, that you will hear me with candor and attention, if I express myself with that plainness, which a sense of duty requires.

THE psalm, from which I have taken the text, is generally ascribed to David ; and from the tenor of it, it is concluded, that he composed it when in a state of exile from the sanctuary, either on account of the enmity of Saul, or the rebellion of Absalom. It begins, " how amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart, and my flesh, cry out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my king, and my God." Beautiful strains ! and divinely expressive of a devout mind ! He goes on, "*Blessed are they that dwell in thy house : they will be still praising thee.*" It is afterwards added, "*For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand :* I had rather

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rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Such are the parts of this divine composition, which more immediately refer to the subject of public worship. But the psalm is beautiful throughout: the sentiments, contained in it, are excellent: and in the metaphors employed to set off those sentiments, there is something highly engaging.

But, to return to the text, *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.* The house of God here intends the tabernacle, which, previous to the building of the temple, was considered as the special residence of the most high. And by dwelling in this house, we are to understand, the privilege of going to it, for the purposes of worship, as often as the mind was seriously disposed. Of this privilege, David was, by some means, deprived. He could not go to the tabernacle, as in former times: some political schism had made it unsafe for him to appear in a place, where he had often poured out his devotions, and solicited a blessing from God. He, therefore, laments his condition: he reflects on the inestimable privilege enjoyed by others; and he seems to envy the birds, who could hover round the altar, and take up their abode within the sacred inclosure.

But we need not restrict the words to the tabernacle of Israel; nor confine ourselves to the melancholy situation of David. Any house, appropriated to public worship, is the house of God. This is his habitation. Not that the divine essence is circumscribed by these walls: for the omnipresent Jehovah fills heaven and earth! But, as the ideas of time and place accompany almost all our ideas, so we find ourselves under a necessity of speaking of God as existing in time, and having a peculiar abode. *The house*

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of God is, therefore, a term which we may innocently use: and we may apply it to all places, where the public worship of God is regularly carried on, and his ordinances administered.

To dwell in this house, is to frequent it at all those seasons, which are sacred to devotion. A man cannot be said to *dwell in this house*, unless he repairs to it every *Lord's-day*, and at such other times as are pointed out by authority. He is only an occasional visitor, if he makes his appearance only when the weather is particularly inviting, or when he is tired of his own home. *To dwell in the house of God*, is to attend public worship steadily and constantly. It is to repair to the sacred temple on both parts of the *Lord's-day*. It is to observe, in a religious manner, those days of humiliation and thanksgiving, which owe their appointment to civil authority. And it is to attend all other religious solemnities, when our business will permit. This is dwelling in the house of God, in the christian sense of the words. And such as honour the supreme being, by dwelling in his courts, in the manner above explained, may expect a divine blessing.

In the first place, their steady attendance on public worship, will open to them a source of pure and rational pleasure. They will feel particularly happy, when employed in the offices of devotion; and the lessons of instruction, dispensed from the desk, will afford them real entertainment. You will remember, I am now speaking of those, who dwell in the sacred courts. As for those, who seldom frequent them, it is reasonable to think, that they submit to public worship as a burden, rather than assist at it from any expectation of pleasure. No doubt, it is a weariness to many; and that they feel relieved, when the service

vice is over. On any other supposition, how shall we account for their inattention to this duty? Would they not as steadily visit the house of God, as they visit places of fashionable entertainment, if they could find as much happiness in religious exercises, as in polite amusements?

BUT to those, who have habituated themselves to the public services of religion, those services afford an exquisite pleasure. It is the delight of their souls to worship God in a social manner. "They are glad, when it is said to them, let us go to the house of the Lord." And they can sincerely acquiesce in those words of the psalmist: "Blessed is the man, whom thou choolest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: he shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." They can say with David, "one thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." This is the language of pure devotion; and they, who can adopt these strains, will acknowledge, that no pleasures can be named with those, which they have tasted in the sanctuary.

BAD as the age is, I doubt not there are some, who, from experience, can declare, that I have not unreasonably magnified the pleasures of devotion. I would ask, have you not been happier in the house of prayer, than in the house of feasting? Within these walls, have you not had moments of higher satisfaction, than in any other place? And comparing the time devoted to religion and pleasure, can you not declare, that a day consecrated to the worship of your maker, is now remembered as a more valuable

able part of life, than a thousand otherwise employed. In the opinion of some, these questions may border on extravagance: but I shall be more than justified by the experience of others.

SECONDLY—Blessed are they, who dwell in God's house, because they find not merely entertainment for the moment, but are in the way of receiving lasting improvement. The prayers and praises, which are publicly offered to the Supreme, have a tendency to impress the mind with a lively sense of his being, presence, providence, and authority, and thus to keep us steady in a course of duty. And, from the truths dispensed, every candid mind may derive advantage. If new truths cannot adorn and recommend every discourse, yet important duties may be inculcated: and if those duties are properly explained, and warmly enforced, who will say, that the time is lost, which is spent in hearing moral instruction.

WHETHER a religious discourse shall be more or less profitable, must, in some measure, depend upon the preacher. If unskilful in the choice of his subjects, obscure in his expressions, and lifeless in his delivery; if unhappily disposed to bewilder himself with metaphysic, or to bring forward points of controversy; if, in short, his preaching be of the dry, speculative kind, he cannot profit his charge in the highest degree. But if the christian temper and practice be the prevailing theme of discourse, he may be the happy instrument of turning many from the error of their ways, and confirming them in a course of virtue.

THUS entertained, "blessed are they who dwell in the house of God." They are in the way of receiving the most important religious impressions. They are in the way of learning their duty in all its branches;

branches; and hearing the most persuasive arguments in favour of its practice. In one word, they are in the way of becoming wise to salvation. For this very end, the public solemnities of religion were instituted; the Lord's-day was singled out as a day of rest and devotion; churches were erected, and ministers appointed to the sacred office, in order that Christians might have every advantage for the improvement of their minds, and the regulation of their lives. On such, therefore, as attend with this view, we may pronounce a blessing. They will assuredly go on from strength to strength, and from grace to grace. Their good habits will be established, and their evil ones corrected. And they will be fitted for a world, where the temple of God will stand open day and night; and where the perfections of his nature, and the redemption through his son, will be the subject of unceasing praise.

The house of God presenting, therefore, such scenes of religious pleasure, and its services affording such improvement, how thankful ought we to be, that we are permitted to dwell in that house? How cordially should we welcome the Lord's-day? And how carefully should we improve the hours set apart for public worship? Can there be greater folly than to lose such precious moments? To spend them in idleness, in amusements, or in such business as can be transacted within our own doors, can there be a greater indecency? That it is an affront to God, every one will allow. Is it not also an affront to society, the laws of which regard the Sabbath as a divine institution?

In order to determine the impropriety of any action or omission, we ought to consider their natural tendency. We should inquire, what would be the consequence,

consequence, should men, in general, violate or neglect the particular law, which we have in contemplation. Thus, for instance, in regard to the Lord's-day, the question ought to be, what effect would it have on society, should its members universally disregard it? A man is apt to think, that his particular example can be of little moment. He will say, though I should not appear abroad, others will. Should my seat be vacant, that of others will be filled. The house of God will not be deserted. Some there are, who steadily attend, and they will be sufficient in number to keep up appearances. I may, therefore, indulge myself with staying at home. It is probable, I shall not be missed; or, if I am, my absence will not be esteemed a novelty.

BUT this is taking up the subject in a very wrong manner, and treating it with great unfairness. The question is not, whether the absence of an individual will be an object of public notice; but whether such neglect of a sacred institution, in itself considered, is not highly injurious to society. If I absent myself from worship without a justifying reason, may not my neighbour do the same? And if he does it, may not others follow his example? And should the practice be universal, what will become of religion and morality? Will men remember a God, a providence, a moral government, and a future state, unless publicly reminded of them?

HE, who is capable of reflection, will perceive, that the good order of society essentially depends upon the degree of religion, which prevails among its members. How then can that man be a patriot, who sets an example unfavourable to religion? When he professes to love his country, is it possible to believe him? Did he feel interested in the public welfare,

fare, would he not avoid a practice, which, if universally followed, would be the ruin of society?

BUT leaving political considerations, let us consider the matter in another point of view. A man is raised, by the providence of God, to the important station of the head of a family. Does not humanity dictate, that he should set such an example as would lead his domestic circle to think highly of religion, and to reverence its laws? Is he not wanting in justice, in compassion, if he does not? And may he not charge himself with a considerable portion of the blame, should those, who depend on him, begin life without religion, and end it with infamy?

I BELIEVE, there is no man, who would not choose, that so near connexions as a wife and children, should have some religion. Hence those, who secretly disbelieve the christian revelation, have been willing that it should obtain credit in their family. They have been ready to support it as an useful invention. And it has been their choice, that all connected with them in domestic life, should be educated in the principles, and taught to obey the laws of Christianity. But of what avail are religious instructions, unless enforced by a corresponding example? To children and servants, and indeed, I may say, to all, practice preaches louder than words. If they perceive no signs of religion in those, to whom they are taught to look up as to a head, vain is it to expect, they will ever be formed to virtue by instruction. The eloquence of angels could not say so much in favour of religion, as an habitual neglect of its public institutions would argue against it.

WITH all earnestness, I must, therefore, urge upon all, a stated attendance on public worship, and such an improvement of the Lord's-day, as they can answer

swer to their own consciences. Where can be the hardship of going to the house of God, and joining in its solemnities? Only one day in seven is set apart for this purpose. And but a very small portion of that day is demanded for the public offices of devotion. How unreasonable, then, is it to refuse compliance with an obligation, which can be discharged with so little inconvenience?

LET these considerations dispose every one to remember his duty to God, to society, to his family, and the influence of his example. And let me intreat you, not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is. May you experience all the blessedness of those, who dwell in the house of the Lord. May the pleasures of pure devotion be your portion in this world, as they will constitute your highest happiness in the world to come. From the dispensation of the word, may you derive continual improvement. Received into honest hearts, may the truths of Christianity, like good seed, bring forth an hundred fold. Thus improving in all spiritual wisdom and christian virtue, whilst you adorn religion, may you experience its comforts; and hereafter may receive the full rewards of righteousness, from him, whom you have worshipped, and obeyed.

Sermon XVII.

On an open Profession of Christianity.

JOHN XII. 42.

"NEVERTHELESS, AMONG THE CHIEF RULERS, ALSO, MANY BELIEVED ON HIM; BUT BECAUSE OF THE PHARISEES, THEY DID NOT CONFESS HIM, LEST THEY SHOULD BE PUT OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE."

IT is an observation of one, who was deeply versed in the science of human nature, that "the fear of man bringeth a snare." Among innumerable facts, to which we may appeal, in confirmation of this remark, I know not one more clear and decided than that, which is recorded in the text. With unexampled fidelity, and persevering diligence, our Saviour had unfolded the doctrines of his religion. He had, likewise, done many miracles, in attestation of his divine appointment, to enlighten and reform the world. Still, the infidelity of the nation justified that complaint, "who hath believed our report; and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" In them were verified the words of the prophet, when he beheld the saviour and spake of him: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

BUT though many of the Jews, to whom the Son of God proposed his religion, were unconvinced of its truth, yet there were more believers in reality, than

than in appearance. Among persons of rank, there were some, who yielded to the evidence, by which Christianity was supported. They perceived, that he spake with authority; and that his works established his pretensions. In their hearts, therefore, they received him as the Son of God, and Saviour of men. Still, they wanted firmness to make a public confession of their faith. The scribes and pharisees had it in their power to fix a stigma on any character. They could expose the object of their displeasure to the public odium. And they could expel from their synagogue, any person, whose religious or political principles did not accord with their own. This undue influence, both within the synagogue and without, rendered them very formidable in society. So powerfully did it operate upon some timid believers, as to induce them, though not to stifle, yet to make a secret of their conviction. Of this description was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night, that there might be no witnesses of the visit; and that none but his saviour might hear the momentous confession, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles, which thou dost, except God be with him." And under the same apprehensions, were those described in the text: "Nevertheless, among the chief rulers, also, many believed on him; but because of the pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue": "for," it is added, "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

WHAT a humbling view of human nature have we in this passage? We behold persons, elevated in society, and capable of influencing others by their example, afraid to declare themselves Christians! In the

the conflict between popularity and principle, we perceive the latter bending to the former! We observe more deference paid to the unworthy pharisees, than to the mandates of God! Well might our divine Lord caution his followers against the fear of man. In the instance before us, we see how ensnaring it is; and that there is no end to the mischiefs and inconsistencies, into which it will betray those, who are under its dominion!

BUT, to return to the text—The first remark, suggested in the passage before us, is the indispensable obligation, which every man is under, to own himself a Christian, if persuaded that Christianity is true. The author of our religion has not left us at liberty, either to conceal or avow our sentiments, as we may happen to think it most expedient. If we believe in our hearts, we are commanded to confess with our mouths, the Lord Jesus. “For with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. And the scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed.”

OUR Saviour laid the greatest stress on a public confession of the truth and divinity of his religion, in every case, where its evidence had produced conviction. This was implied in all his invitations; and it was exacted of every one, who declared himself his follower. His language was to this effect: Go, tell the world, that you are not ashamed of my person or cause; assure them, that you receive me as the expected Messiah, and invite them to follow your example. They will object the meanness of my appearance; the self-denying lessons which I teach; the low and obscure state of my earthly connexions; and the contradiction of my circumstan-

ces to those, which would distinguish him, whose arm would accomplish the restoration of Israel. Still, convinced yourselves, you are to bear an un-deviating testimony to my character, as the saviour promised to mankind. You are not to be flattered, or to be awed into silence. But, superior to fear and shame, you are to confess me before men : and I, in return, will confess you before my father, and before the angels.

SUCH, in effect, were the lessons taught by our Lord in person. The apostles spake the same language. A magnanimous confession, that Jesus is the Christ, was absolutely required of all, who yielded to the force of their arguments in defence of the gospel. The early converts were not allowed to consult their convenience, their popularity, or their safety. No arts of concealment were to be practised by them : but they were to take their chance in the world, as Christians in faith, and Christians in profession. Otherwise, their silence was to be construed into a denial of the saviour, and a resignation of all the expectations excited by the gospel.

It appears, therefore, that the belief and profession of Christianity were inseparable in the view of its great author, and of those who were commissioned by him to propagate its truths, and to extend its empire in the world. They acknowledged none to be Christians, who did not openly acknowledge themselves under that denomination. Nor have we any authority to set aside their regulations, or to recede from their example. If we believe the religion of Jesus to be divine, we are bound to proclaim our assent to it, and our respect for him, by whom it was communicated to mankind. We ought to make a public declaration, that “ we are not ashamed of
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the gospel of Christ, inasmuch as it is the power of God to salvation to every one who believeth."

THIS may be done by a verbal acknowledgment of its truth, accompanied with the regular observance of its positive institutions. In this manner, the primitive Christians did homage to the truth. As soon as conviction took place, they openly declared their approbation of the gospel; received baptism; put themselves under the direction of the saviour; and after his death, united in the stated commemoration of that great event. You will observe, I am now speaking of those who were persons of firmness and principle; and who preferred the approbation of God, and their own consciences, to the applauses of men.

AND thus should we, at this age, confess the sentiments, which we entertain, respecting the christian religion. Convinced that God spake by Christ, we should appear open advocates of his cause. We should give countenance to the gospel by an unequivocal acknowledgment of the high estimation in which we hold it. We should receive it as our rule of life. And as actions are more expressive of our sentiments than words, we should celebrate the communion; or, more plainly speaking, should, in a public manner, commemorate the tragical death of our blessed Redeemer. This is confessing the Son of God in the sense of the gospel, and agreeably to his own direction. Nor, if we believe, can we, with any consistency or propriety, decline this public confession. For the same lips, which commanded truth and justice, humility and benevolence, purity and devotion, commanded an explicit acknowledgment, that Jesus is the Christ. And the same lips which declared, that workers of iniquity would be rejected at the great day,

day, declared likewise, that they, who dared not to confess him before men, would be involved in the same ignominious fate.

THE question, however, may be asked, why a formal profession of Christianity is so binding on all, who believe it to be a religion from above? Why may not a person keep his sentiments to himself? Whence the necessity that he should proclaim to the world, that he is a Christian? Is it not enough that he believes, with his whole heart, the truths inculcated by Christ; that he esteems him a perfect example; and that he builds all his future hopes on the promises and discoveries of the gospel? In a certain case, the apostle says, "hast thou faith, keep it to thyself;" why may not this counsel admit of a general application?

I ANSWER—If a public profession be absolutely enjoined by Christ, that, of itself, ought to overrule every objection. We have no right to demand the particular reason of every law, as a condition of our obedience. There may be reasons in the divine mind, which are incomprehensible by finite beings. If, therefore, no conceivable end could be obtained by our religious confession, still the command would retain all its obligation. To know that any particular act is the will of Christ, is to know that we are absolutely bound to its performance.

BUT all the reasons of the duty before us, are not inscrutable. We are social beings; Christianity is a common cause; and its moral influence on the human heart greatly depends on the mutual countenance, and united efforts of its believers. The open confession of one, tends to draw the same confession from another; and by means of these confessions, the public attention is directed towards the christian religion;

religion; and the cause assumes importance in the eyes of the multitude. The human kind being prone to imitation, one professed believer will incline many to examine, and encourage many to acknowledge their assent to the gospel.

To feel the weight and importance of these observations, let us only reflect, how much every cause is indebted to its open advocates. What would have been the political state of our country, if the opinions of the patriot had been locked up in his own bosom? The believers in civil freedom might have imitated those believers of the gospel, who are mentioned in the text. They might have felt a strong conviction, that there are rights, which are the noble inheritance of every human being. But the apprehension of personal danger might have induced them to make a secret of this conviction. If they had acted this over cautious part, their principles would have been useless to society; and the rod of oppression would have remained unbroken. But daring to avow what they had greatness to conceive, many converts were made to the cause of civil freedom. Their opinions were disseminated; their example was followed; and principles were put in action, which, under God, produced one of the most extraordinary events recorded in the history of man.

BUT, like consequences may be expected from religious, as from civil professions. Every person, who owns himself a Christian, gives countenance to the sacred cause of truth and virtue: he often communicates, with his religious sentiments, a portion of his own zeal. This renders his christian confession of infinite importance to others. Whilst it enlightens and animates, it powerfully persuades them to go and do likewise. The express command of Christ,
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and the visible consequences of obedience in this instance, show, that the belief of Christianity ought ever to be accompanied with its public profession.

I NOW proceed to a second consideration, namely, the prevailing neglect of this duty, and its probable cause. The rulers, mentioned in the text, concealed their belief, because they knew the temper of the pharisees; and were apprehensive, that, if their sentiments were disclosed, they should be cast out of the synagogue. Fear, therefore, induced them to make a secret of their faith; and it may be reasonably supposed, that the same principle prevailed with many others to follow their example. They could not bring themselves to a voluntary renunciation of the public good opinion, of ease, of interest, and of personal safety, for the sake of a calumniated Saviour, and an unpopular cause.

THE dangers, which they apprehended, do not exist at the present age. The christian profession is not attended with any particular odium: but, if it is not unpopular, it is unfashionable to acknowledge Christ, and our respect for his religion: and this is a circumstance, which operates most unfavourably to the gospel. Some, who do not confess, though they believe the christian religion, may be restrained by other causes. There are eminently good persons, who distrust their own moral qualifications to confess the Son of God, in the manner which he has prescribed. Unhappily for them, and for the cause, they have been led into erroneous opinions, relative to this duty. Under the influence of these opinions, whilst their hearts have been with those who confessed the Saviour, they have not personally assisted in this act of homage.

OTHERS have imitated the example in the text,

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not from any suspicion of their own unworthiness, but from doubts of the real necessity of a public profession. They have thought it enough to observe those seasons, which are consecrated to religion, and to attend its public offices; to have their infant offspring dedicated to the Saviour, and to make the plainer principles and duties of Christianity a part of their early education. But, if religious communion be absolutely required by Christ, who shall presume to call its necessity in question? If, in his view, it be essential to a public confession of his divine authority, it ought surely to be observed. Can we entertain a suspicion of his superior wisdom; or dare we set up our judgment in opposition to his?

Of those, who do not confess Christ, the greater number, however, are not influenced by this consideration. The true cause of this growing neglect must be the fears, which many entertain, of the remarks to which their profession of Christianity might give occasion. When iniquity abounds, many profane liberties will be taken with serious things, and serious persons. Scoffers, walking after their own lusts, will endeavour to render the christian name a term of reproach. And many circumstances will concur, in an age of licentiousness, to make an open avowal of our respect for Christianity, and our resolution to follow its precepts, unfashionable. Now, the fear of incurring this censure prevents many from acting independently; and induces them to withhold their countenance from the cause of religion. They have not resolution to own themselves Christians. If they could rise superior to their fears, they would declare, that they are not ashamed of the gospel; and would unite with others in defending its honour, and promoting its interests.

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FROM the subject of this discourse, we are led to reflect on the fatal tendency of a slavish fear of man, where religion and duty are concerned. We have seen how it operated on some, who were contemporary with our Saviour, and who were convinced of his high appointment to bless mankind, by turning them from their iniquities. They would not take up their cross and follow him; nor would they purchase his friendship, at the expense of their seat in the synagogue, and the good opinion of our Lord's enemies.

THESE things were written for our admonition: and they ought to put us on our guard, lest we fall into their condemnation, who loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. "A good name," it is acknowledged, "is better than much riches." And to commend ourselves to all, in the sight of God, is a duty of religion. But this good name is not to be purchased at the expense of any one virtue; nor are we to act against the conviction of our own reason, in any single instance, in order to conciliate the favour of others. The fear of man must be overcome: we must consider what is right; and we must leave the consequences with him, who is the disposer of all events.

THIS is agreeable to that direction of our blessed Saviour, "fear not them that kill the body; but rather fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body." Upon the favour of God, our future well-being absolutely depends. If he is our friend, we must be happy. But if objects of his displeasure, the approbation of the whole world will profit us nothing. In another state, it will afford us no consolation to reflect, that we have been on friendly terms with men, if to gain them we have made a sacrifice

sacrifice of faith and a good conscience. So far from it, this consideration will embitter our future sufferings.

THESE observations deserve the serious attention of all, who respect the religion of Jesus ; and believe it to be divine. They cannot stand acquitted to their own consciences, unless they do whatsoever the Saviour has commanded. But is it not his command, that they who are convinced of his mission into this world, should publish their conviction ? Has he not enjoined a confession of his religion in the strongest possible terms ? Has he not declared, that a refusal will be attended with the most shameful consequences ? What presumption then is it, to live in continual neglect of a duty, which is so solemnly enjoined ; and which the Saviour of men has made the test of our affection for him, and the condition of his future approbation.

Do you unfeignedly believe that Christ was sent from God, to recover the human kind to the knowledge and practice of virtue ? Do you believe that his religion is a divine institution ? Do you assent to the perfection of his example ? Then openly confess your admiration of the Saviour, and your belief of the gospel : and glory in a system of faith and practice, so worthy of God, and so conducive to the moral improvement of your nature. Let the professions of your lips be verified by the tenor of your practice. Then will you have boldness in the day of the Lord. That saviour, whom you have confessed, will proclaim your fidelity, and conduct you to the kingdom of his father.

Sermon XVIII.

On the Observation of the Lord's-day.

REVELATION, I. 10.

"I WAS IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD'S-DAY."

IT was a special injunction on the ancient people of God, to remember the sabbath-day; and to keep it holy. The reason for distinguishing this day from all others, is assigned in the following words: "For in six days, Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it." In obedience to this divine command, the people abstained from all manner of work on that day; and they permitted their servants and cattle to enjoy a temporary repose. The more conscientious Jews continued, in this manner, to observe the sabbath, even to the gospel age. They suspended their ordinary labours; and, for their mutual improvement, they assembled in synagogues, where select portions of the law were read and explained. Our blessed Saviour himself conformed to this practice. Hence, we often read of his visits to the synagogue, and of the admirable lessons of wisdom and piety which proceeded from his lips.

AFTER his resurrection, the first day of the week began to command the reverence of his followers, because, on that day, he arose from the grave; and because, on that day, in preference to any other, he more than once appeared to his disciples. Thus we
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read in the sacred history of our Saviour, "the same day, at evening, being the *first* day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, peace be unto you." After the revolution of another week, the disciples received another visit from their divine master; and were honoured with the same benediction. His rising and appearing on the first day would, therefore, naturally excite a religious respect for it; and would lead the Gentile converts at least to observe it as their sabbath.

THESE, however, are not the only arguments which can be offered in vindication of the Lord's-day. The apostles, who were divinely inspired, consecrated that day to public worship, religious instruction, and christian communion. We may, therefore, conclude, that they had the approbation of Christ, who was present with them by means of the holy spirit; and who really taught them what they should speak, and how they should conduct. As to the Jewish converts, they were allowed to keep both the seventh and the first day: but the duty of the Gentile converts was clearly prescribed by the practice of the apostles. The example of men in their extraordinary circumstances; men who were supernaturally enlightened; men who were ambassadors of the Son of God; the example of such men must be equivalent to any formal command. That it was thus viewed by succeeding Christians, is most certain; for it would otherwise be impossible to account for the general observance of the Lord's-day.

To such as are impressed with these facts, the following exhortation will not seem an unreasonable abridgment

abridgment of christian liberty. Remember the Lord's-day to keep it holy. In it, thou shalt do no unnecessary work ; but, abstaining from distracting cares, and dissipating pleasures, thou shalt call up to view the Saviour of the world ; shalt attend to the counsels of his religion ; shalt render public homage, in his name, to the Supreme Ruler of the universe ; and shalt perform the more private offices of devotion. For on that day, the author of our salvation rose from the grave ; and brought life and immortality to light. On that memorable day, he confounded his enemies, and gave everlasting consolation to his friends. On that glorious day, he proved himself to be the Son of God with power ; confirmed his divine religion ; obviated every objection to his character ; in a manner, abolished death ; became the first fruits of all who sleep ; and laid a certain foundation for the conquest of all his enemies, and for the introduction of that glorious period, when God will be all in all ? A day, consecrated to the pious recollection of so great a personage, so great a work, and to such honourable services, ought not surely to be confounded with others. Cold must be that heart, which cannot be delighted by reflections and duties proper to such a season. Barren must be that understanding, which rather endures, than enjoys the christian sabbath. " This is the day which the Lord hath honoured, let us rejoice and be glad therein," seems to be the natural language of piety and gratitude. And it will be our language, as long as we have hearts to feel, and minds to be entertained.

THE words, which I have chosen as a theme of discourse, were uttered by the venerable christian prophet, who was banished to the isle of Patmos.

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To sweeten his solitude, the blessed Jesus condescended to reveal to him many future, but highly interesting events. As a prelude to these discoveries, the apostle was, in an extraordinary manner, filled with the holy spirit. The time of this illumination was the Lord's-day. A description of his solitude, of his peculiar state of mind, of the objects seen, and the voices heard, we have in the chapter, whence I have taken the text. I shall not detain you with them ; but, accommodating the words of the holy prophet to the present age, I shall endeavour to illustrate, and recommend the spirit becoming the Lord's-day.

AFTER the ascension of our divine Lord, there were extraordinary communications of the spirit. These, however, ceased, when Christianity had gained so many conquests in the world, as to be able to support itself by its own intrinsic excellence, and by the external evidence with which it was accompanied. Since that time, there have been no supernatural operations of the spirit, though some enthusiasts have imagined that they had experienced such operations. That we, therefore, should be in the spirit on the Lord's-day, in that sublime sense, in which the words were used by the apostle, is not to be expected. Still there is a spirit which we should carefully cherish ; and with which we should be filled on the christian sabbath : and what that is, it shall be my endeavour to ascertain.

A SPIRIT of true piety and fervent devotion should warm and animate every Christian on the Lord's-day. At that sacred and delightful season, his thoughts should be called off from other objects ; and should be directed towards God, and our duty ; the Saviour, and the everlasting blessings purchased by

by him. I would not, however, be understood, that such pious reflections should be peculiar to that day, which is more immediately claimed by religion. It is the fatal mistake of some persons, to confine all their seriousness to the sabbath. With a more than Jewish rigour, they keep holy time ; whilst, at other times, God is not in all their thoughts. Such conduct is directly opposed to the genius of the gospel ; and it is very injurious in its tendency. It makes religion a burden, particularly to young persons ; and it creates prejudices against it, which, perhaps, may never be subdued. Nor is that all : they, who overdo in some things, are apt to be deficient in others. Hence, the strict observance of all the moral duties has not distinguished every one, who has aimed at keeping a Jewish, rather than a Christian sabbath.

ACCORDING to the true principles of the gospel, every day should witness the devotion of those, who profess themselves Christians. A good man should be habitually pious. He should feel the influence of his religion, as well on days of labour, as days of rest ; as well when he makes a bargain, as when he makes a prayer. The spirit of the gospel should actuate him at all times ; should direct his conversation always, and regulate his whole behaviour. They, who have their seasons of devotion, and their seasons of levity and folly ; their seasons, in which they honour God, and seasons, in which they set his authority at defiance ; seasons, in which the best principles are professed, and those in which very unsuitable things are practised ; persons of this description have not any religion, which will avail them at a future day. They may flatter themselves, that they are wise for both worlds : but whatever they may secure here, they will lose the portion offered them hereafter.

It should, then, be the aim of a Christian, to be uniformly virtuous, and habitually devout. The spirit of his religion should have a constant and predominant influence: still this influence should be most visible on the Lord's-day. Excused from the calls of business, and under no necessity of yielding to those of pleasure, a disciple of Jesus should awaken the spirit of the gospel; and should display that divine spirit, if not more sincerely, yet more visibly, than at other seasons. Amid the cares of this world, and the distractions of business, the restraints of religion may be felt. But there must be a suspension of labour and amusements, in order that the spirit of true piety may show itself by acts of devotion.

THE spirit proper to the Lord's-day may, therefore, be defined, a spirit of seriousness, a spirit favourable to meditation, a spirit inclining to private, domestic, and social worship; a spirit propitious to the receiving and communicating of religious instruction; a spirit of the warmest gratitude for the great salvation revealed in the gospel. This is the true christian spirit; and with this, every one should be filled, who feels himself under any obligations to God; or entertains a proper respect for the Saviour.

BUT as the operation of the spirit will, in the best manner, illustrate the nature of it, I will endeavour to show what proofs it will give of its real existence on the Lord's-day. And, if a man be in the spirit on that holy day, he will remember the special design of it, and will keep it holy. He will conscientiously abstain from business, and from recreations, which are lawful at all other times. This, I should imagine, any good citizen would do from those principles which constitute a good citizen, namely, a zeal for public order, and a reverence for the laws of society.

society. Surely, it is no light offence to transgress the laws of man, when those laws are the voice of the people, expressed by persons of their own appointment. In other cases, the force of this argument would be admitted: why not, then, where morality and religion are concerned? *How is it?*

POLITICAL considerations are not, however, those to which I would call your attention. A spirit of true piety is the spring of action now under examination. And I repeat it, they who are in this spirit, will not consume the Lord's-day in idleness; will not profane it by riotous pleasures; will not give it to company; will not devote it to business of any kind, even to such as may be transacted within their own walls. To be in the spirit, is to have a conscience in religious concerns; and to be restrained by principle from such abuses as I have now mentioned. One proof, therefore, that the spirit of piety is in exercise, is a reservation of the Lord's-day as a season of rest.

BUT this is not all: a man who possesses the true spirit of his religion, will employ a portion of sacred time in the private offices of devotion, in consulting the volume of inspiration, in perusing such works as unfold the principles, enforce the duties, or confirm the evidence of Christianity. The sabbath presenting a favourable opportunity for reading, meditation, and inquiry, it will be most welcome to those, who do not feel too wise to learn, nor too good to need any further improvement. They, who are conscious of the imperfection of their character, will avail themselves of such a season for gaining religious knowledge; and will think no time better spent than that which is consecrated to sacred studies.

IF, then, you are in the spirit on the Lord's-day, you will reserve a part of that day for consulting the word

word of God, in order that you may revive serious impressions; and that you may be excited to every good work. Earnestly desirous to increase in the knowledge, fear, and love of God, your reading will be conducive to this very important object: it will be serious and improving. You will also compare your principles and actions, with those which have the sanction of the gospel. And under the influence of a christian spirit, you will privately repair to him, who giveth to all men liberally; and you will ask of him a blessing on your sincere endeavours to know and perform your duty. The spirit proper to the Lord's-day will certainly excite the good desires, and dictate those religious exercises, which I have now described. Like any other cause and effect, they are necessarily connected.

FURTHER—The sabbath is a favourable season, not only for acquiring, but communicating knowledge. They who have a household to superintend, ought, therefore, to reserve some time for the peculiar duties of their station. He, who is in the spirit on the Lord's-day, will make this reservation. He will embrace so inviting an opportunity to instruct those whom God has committed to his care; and who look up to him for instruction and example. Agreeably to his solemn engagements, he will bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; will acquaint them with the character of their Maker, with the favours received from him, and the duties which they owe him; will introduce them to the Saviour of the world; will explain his precepts, and propose his example; will describe his sufferings, and enumerate the blessings derived from his mediation: in a word, he will admonish, exhort, encourage, and employ every measure which religion will sanction, for

for their moral improvement. In this sacred place, many have called God to witness, that they would act this faithful and benevolent part towards those whom he had given them. On the Lord's-day, this promise should recur to their minds. Compassion to their household should enforce it. Nor will their duty be a burden, if they have the spirit of religion. That most excellent spirit will enable them to draw the highest pleasure from their honourable labours to diffuse christian knowledge; and they will experience no greater joy, than when teaching the sublime art of growing in favour both with God and man.

—The operations of that spirit, in which we should all be on the Lord's-day, are not, however, confined to the bosom or the family of a good man. As that day is set apart for public worship, and public instruction, the spirit proper to it, will manifest itself in the house of God. He, who is led by it, will be conducted to the sanctuary; and the man, who is filled with it, will assist in its awful solemnities. The spirit, becoming the christian sabbath, will repress all wanderings of the mind; will exclude all vain thoughts; and will render prayer, confession, and praise, the work, not of the person officiating only, but of all who are inspired with it. It will make that a social act, which is too generally viewed in a different light. There cannot be a greater, though, I fear, there is not a more prevailing mistake, than that the prayers, uttered from this place, are the work of the minister, not of the congregation. My friends, we assemble in this place for social worship; to render our united homage to the Most High; to perform an act of religion, not in our individual capacity, but as a spiritual body. Whoever reflects, will perceive, that this is the design of our
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stated visits to the house of prayer. If, then, we have the true spirit of prayer, we shall all bear our part in it. We shall not merely attend to the petitions offered; but they will be our petitions. Though, to avoid confusion, the voice be one, yet the praises and thanksgivings will be those of many. In every office of devotion, the spirit becoming this day, and this place, will produce one heart and one soul.

OF FINALLY.—To be in that peculiar state of mind, which has been described in this discourse, is to be disposed to hear, with attention, the truths and counsels of religion, the public dispensation of which is one of the duties assigned to the Lord's day.—They, who have the true spirit of Christians, will be swift to hear, slow to condemn, and impartial to apply. They will not repair to the house of God, as they would go to a theatre; to be entertained for the moment; to observe the peculiar manner of the performer, and to have an opportunity to criticise. Views and expectations of so inferior a nature, will never enter their minds, who are in the spirit, and who know the value of sacred time. They will visit the temple of the great God, not as spectators, but as worshippers; not to observe how a discourse is delivered, but what doctrine it explains, or what duty it inculcates; not for temporary entertainment, but for real and lasting improvement. Any peculiarity of voice or gesture, or any deficiency in the graces of elocution, will be easily excused by those, whose great concern it is, to be encouraged, reproved, and instructed in righteousness. Their minds will be open only to serious impressions. And the conviction, that something useful may be derived from the word of exhortation, will always excite an attention, and a seriousness, becoming the house of God;

God; and indispensable in those, who profess to worship in spirit and in truth.

THE privilege of the Lord's-day, and the spirit becoming that day, have, I presume, been sufficiently explained to show the value of the one, and the importance of the other. In what degree we possess the spirit of devotion, is a point not to be overlooked, nor even to be dismissed, with a slight examination. Do we anticipate the Lord's-day with unfeigned pleasure? Do we, not from mere policy, but from principle, abstain from labour, and vain amusements? Do we have the sabbath to ourselves, excusing ourselves from those social entertainments, which our circumstances might support; and which our station in society may seem to require? Do we religiously perform those acts of devotion, which become a well-ordered family? Do we endeavour to revive old impressions, and to gain new information from the inspired volume; and are we as careful to communicate, as to acquire the knowledge of our duty? The psalmist exclaims, "I was glad, when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the Lord." Did we ever experience the exultation of mind, which produced this declaration? Do we, when in this place, feel as though we were in the presence of the eternal God; and do we unfeignedly unite in the prayers and supplications, intercessions and praises, which are addressed to the Deity? Do we feel as though we were honouring God, and imploring his favour? Are we attentive to the word preached, as a lesson of sacred instruction, which is to be treasured up in our hearts; which is to be reviewed, when we return to our respective homes; and which is to make us wiser and better through life? Applying these queries to this very day, can we answer

swer them in the affirmative? Does the review of this day, the manner in which it has been spent, the course of our reading and conversation, and the employment of our thoughts during divine service, give us pleasure or pain? I presume, we must all be dissatisfied with ourselves, when we compare our conduct and our duty.

As we must answer at the bar of God for all our privileges, let it be our concern, that the Lord's-day, that most valuable privilege, be not profaned or neglected. By serious meditation, let the true spirit of that day be awakened in our bosoms: then will the sanctuary be frequented; and the services of it be cheerfully attended. "Whatever we do, we shall do heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." A rational and fervent devotion will unite with justice and benevolence to adorn our character: and we shall be prepared for that everlasting sabbath, which remaineth for the people of God.

Sermon XIX.

Duty of the Afflicted to pray.

JAMES V. 13.

"IS ANY AMONG YOU AFFLICTED? LET HIM PRAY."

THAT the gospel suits its instructions to every condition and circumstance of human life, is one of its highest recommendations. Whether a man be high or low, rich or poor, in prosperity or adversity,

adversity, he may find his duty clearly revealed in the sacred pages. In particular, does the gospel furnish consolation to the children of distress; and point out the measures which are to be taken, when the burden of affliction presses with uncommon weight. To raise our spirits, it reveals a blessed immortality; and to employ our thoughts, it sets before us a God, and an over-ruling providence; and directs us to maintain an intercourse with him in the duty of prayer. Such is the salutary and excellent counsel, which we find in the text. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." These are the words of James: and they were addressed to the christian world, at a time, when the religion of Jesus laboured under great discouragements; and when, of all men, his disciples were the most miserable.

My design, in the following discourse, is to consider the exhortation in the text; and to show the advantages of observing it, as an invariable rule, in all seasons of adversity.

FIRST—Are any among you afflicted? Perhaps this question could at no time be proposed, when some might not, and with great truth, answer in the affirmative. Even in seasons of general prosperity, there are individuals, whose hearts are in heaviness. Many afflictions are of such a nature, that it would be neither policy nor wisdom to expose them to the world. Many of our cares and perplexities could not be revealed, without increasing the evil. And there are many others, which ought to be veiled from the public eye, because they do not concern society; and because, if known, they might provoke the contempt of the world, rather than its compassion. We are not, therefore, to suppose, that those only are miserable, who openly complain. There are

many sons and daughters of affliction, who pass through life unknown and unpitied. And their sorrows are not the less real, for being confined to their own bosoms.

OUR Saviour has said, "in this world, ye shall have tribulation." Nor did his sacred lips ever utter a more just remark. His own disciples had their peculiar troubles. And mankind, universally, have their vexations and trials. Something occurs in the life of every man, to show him, that this is a state of discipline, not of enjoyment. The unkindnesses received from the world, the loss of substance, the loss of health, and the loss of friends, bear an invariable testimony to this truth. And if to these private evils, we add the public calamities, to which all nations are liable, we cannot doubt the vanity and imperfection of the present state. Every day furnishes new proofs, that pure and uninterrupted happiness, in this world, is not the appointment of God. So far from it, days of prosperity and adversity are the divine allotment. And God has set the one over against the other, in order that the moral ends of our creation may be secured.

WHAT proportion the miseries of life bear to its blessings, I would not undertake to determine. Some have insisted, that the balance is in favour of good. And others maintain, that taking mankind at large, they suffer more than they enjoy. The experience of every one must, in this case, guide his decisions. Leaving out those evils, which we foolishly, unnecessarily, and perversely bring on ourselves, we can have no doubt, that those, which remain, are few in number, compared with our blessings. In judging of the divine allotments, we ought not, therefore, to take into the account, the fruits of our own folly. And
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making this deduction, we shall not hesitate to acknowledge, that "the Lord is good to all; and that his tender mercies are over all his works."

BUT as there are troubles, which are unavoidable; and which take place in consequence of the general laws, by which the world is governed, I proceed to inquire, secondly, how we are to conduct, when visited with those troubles. And the counsel of the apostle is, that, when afflicted, we should devoutly and earnestly pray. The great God is the disposer of all events. Though invisible, he is universally present. And though we do not discern the hand which chastens, yet we can have no doubt of his agency, as well in the judgments inflicted on us, as in blessings bestowed. In the sacred scriptures, God asserts his agency, in the distribution of that good and evil, which exist in the world. "I form the light, and I create darkness," is his own exalted language. And it may be observed, that in their most intense sufferings, the good men, whose afflictions are recorded in the sacred volume, acknowledge the providence of God.

To him, therefore, our prayers should be addressed in seasons of adversity. We should repair to him, as the righteous governor of the world. And we should approach him with a perfect confidence in his disposition to hear, and his ability to afford us relief. In the name, and through the mediation of Christ, we should offer up our supplications. And having expressed our desires with a becoming modesty, we should commit ourselves to the supreme disposer of all things, either to continue, to mitigate, or to remove our sorrows, as his own infinite wisdom shall direct. This is the indispensable duty of all, who are in affliction. This is also their privilege.

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Nor is it possible to describe the loss which they sustain, who, when afflicted, neglect the offices of devotion, and refuse its comforts.

BUT it may be of importance to determine, for what particular mercies we ought to pray, when in circumstances of distress. And it appears to me, that of whatever nature our troubles may be, it is perfectly justifiable to pray for relief. If on the bed of sickness, we may pray for health : if tortured with pains, we may pray for ease : if distressed with want, we may pray for all needful supplies : if in personal danger, we may pray for protection : if our misery arises from the ill usage of the world, we may pray for justice : if threatened with the loss of any near relatives or friends, we may pray for the continuance of their lives : and if actually visited with this calamity, we may pray that the painful remembrance of our loss may be effaced ; that all tears may be wiped from our eyes ; that our mourning may be turned into joy ; and our complaints to praise. That we are authorised to address God in this strain, and earnestly to implore the removal of our troubles, are points which cannot be disputed. The propriety of such requests may be inferred from the desires, which God has implanted in us. When the clouds of adversity gather over us, it is impossible not to wish to see them dispersed. When pressed down with affliction, it is impossible not to desire that the burden should be removed. An aversion to evil, and the love of happiness, are an original part of our constitution. Nature, therefore, teaches us, in times of distress, to pray for a period to our miseries.

NOR are the dictates of nature contradicted by the voice of divine revelation. When afflicted, we are not merely permitted, but expressly commanded, to pray.

pray. And in some of the best characters, which are proposed to our imitation, we have examples of such particular requests as we are now considering. Our blessed Saviour had such apprehensions of a cruel and infamous death, that he prayed, if possible, that the cup might pass from him. The apostle Paul intreated the Lord thrice, that he might be delivered from the thorn in his flesh. What particular evil he meant by this expression, we are unable to determine : but we know that it was something which greatly mortified him. David prayed for the life of a beloved child. And good Hezekiah prayed, that his days might not come to a close, at the time predicted by the man of God.

ARE any among you afflicted ? according to the nature of your affliction, you may frame your requests. Have you met with losses and disappointments in your worldly concerns ? you may ask of him, who giveth to all liberally, that your losses may be so far repaired, as to raise you above a state of abject dependence. Are your enjoyments disturbed by bodily pains ; and your fears alarmed by the apprehensions of death ? you are at liberty to prefer the petition of the psalmist : “ O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.” Are you anxious for your country, you may pray for its salvation. Do your tears flow for the loss of some object, from whom you are separated by the stroke of death ? religion does not prohibit the fervent prayer, that the wound may be closed ; and that you may recover that tranquillity of mind, which is necessary, as well for a proper discharge of the duties, as for the enjoyment of life. Comforts and blessings, which we may innocently desire, we may lawfully ask.

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BUT, secondly, in affliction we should pray, that, if our sorrows be neither mitigated nor removed, we may bear them with a proper temper. In his wise and holy providence, God may not see fit to grant that immediate relief, which we have earnestly supplicated. To his infinite wisdom, it may appear expedient, that our sufferings should continue. Though we cannot, yet *he* may perceive, that our subjection to adversity will be the means of exalting our virtues; and making us, in all respects, wiser and better. There are secrets in the divine government, which the very angels desire to look into. And as to the measures of his providence towards the human kind, it is impossible that minds so feeble as ours, should discern all the great and benevolent ends, to which they are subservient.

Our prayers, therefore, should be accommodated to this state of darkness and uncertainty. With unfeigned confidence in the divine wisdom, we should intreat the supreme disposer of all events to support us under our sufferings; and to enable us to bear them with patience. We should ask of God, to preserve us from all hard thoughts, both of his character and his government. And we should most fervently pray, that whatever evils we may endure, we may never be tempted to charge him foolishly; or even to suspect the righteousness of his administrations. Blind, ignorant, and unworthy, shall we presume to say, "What doest thou? or why doest thou thus?"

To deprecate impatience, and to request a humble and resigned temper of mind, are, therefore, indispensable duties in time of affliction. On the bed of sickness, we should pray that our spirits may not sink, nor our patience be exhausted. Disappointed in our worldly projects, and reduced by losses, we should

should pray that God would preserve us from discontent with his allotments, from an envious and malicious temper towards those, who have not met with our misfortunes; and from all unlawful measures to retrieve our circumstances. Misrepresented, defamed, or otherwise injured by our fellow-men, we should pray, that if we cannot obtain redress, we may abstain from revenge. And when deprived of our earthly connexions, if we cannot forget the loss, we should pray that we may bear it with that greatness of mind, which Christianity recommends. Such addresses to the supreme majesty of heaven and earth, become both our religious character and our station. They discover a proper sense of our wants; and they express a pious confidence in his wisdom and benevolence, who orders all events, whether merciful or afflictive.

THE divine author of our religion was a pattern of patience and resignation. He prayed, that if possible, the cup might pass from him; but he immediately added, "not my will, but thine be done." And with the same resignation to the will of God, should we supplicate relief. To our prayers, we should always subjoin our consent, that God should dispose of us according to his pleasure: for we must be persuaded, that infinite wisdom cannot err; and that infinite goodness cannot do wrong.

THIRDLY—In affliction, we should pray, not merely that our sorrows may be endured with patience, but that they may bring forth in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. It is most certain, that God afflicts us for wise and good ends. He always acts with design: and his designs, in the judgments brought on his creatures, are worthy of his infinite benevolence. Hence we read, "for whom the Lord loveth,

loveth, he chasteneth ; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." And again : " We have had fathers of the flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence ; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the father of spirits, and live ? For they verily, for a few days, chastened us for their pleasure ; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." God is our father : and it is his benevolent intention to form us to the character of obedient children. Sometimes, mercies, and at other times, judgments, are therefore employed to accomplish this object.

For these reasons, we should fervently pray, in time of affliction, that our troubles may be the means of our spiritual improvement. We should pray, that our pains of body, and perplexities of mind, might wean us from this world ; and excite us to look for a better. We should pray, that the loss of our worldly substance might lead us to withdraw our confidence from all earthly treasures ; and to fix our hopes on a more durable inheritance. And we should pray, that the death of our friends might dispose us to reflect on our own mortality ; and to prepare for it by a life of sobriety, righteousness, and piety. As we must die ; and as God only knows how soon our change may take place, we cannot be too earnest in our supplications, that the removal of our friends may lead us to number our days aright, and to apply our hearts to wisdom.

We have many faults to be corrected ; and there are many virtues, after which we ought to aspire. But affliction, however ingrateful for the present, may be blest to both these purposes. It may cure us of an immoderate attachment to our friends, to our honours, to our treasures, to the enjoyments of this state,

state, and even to life itself. And it may strengthen our confidence in the over-ruling providence of God; give firmness to our minds; inflame our zeal; and increase our desires of uninterrupted and eternal felicity. There is, therefore, sufficient ground to ask of God these spiritual blessings. The distresses of life, having a natural tendency to rectify our disorders, and to improve our virtues, we ought, in justice to ourselves, to make these things the subject of our request.

FINALLY—Are any afflicted, they should pray, that in proportion to their sufferings here, may be their glory and blessedness hereafter. The apostle assures us, that the sufferings of this present state are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. And he expresses the utmost confidence, that men, who have met with uncommon trials in this world, and have endured them with patience and fortitude, will receive their compensation in “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

WE are, then, authorized to pray, that our troubles may have this glorious and happy termination. Having received our evil things here, we may ask for those good things which are to come. And having experienced great tribulation, and washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, we may pray, that an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Christ; and that an exalted place, at his right hand, may crown our labours and trials. So will the words of the apostle be divinely verified in our future condition: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

I HAVE NOW enumerated the particular favours, which we should ask of God in seasons of distress.— And with what gratitude ought we to reflect on this privilege? What a favour is it, to be permitted to spread our wants before God? What a comfort, to know that we may go to him as a father? What a support, to be assured that he is willing to hear us; and that he never said to the most forlorn of the human species, “seek ye my face in vain.” Permitted, and even invited, by God himself, to repair to him in adversity, let us avail ourselves of this invaluable privilege. Are any, in this assembly, in circumstances of want? remember, that the assignment of our condition, in this world, is the work of God; and that an application to him will not be rejected. If best for you, he will grant relief: if not, he will give you patience. From prayer, you will unquestionably derive either a temporal or a spiritual blessing. Are any occasionally exercised with pains and sickness? recollect in whose hand our breath is; and whose prerogative it is, to kill and to make alive; and pray that his mercy may restore, or his grace support you. Are any, at this time, lamenting the ravages of death? call to mind that sovereign providence, without which a sparrow doth not fall to the ground. Consider who it is that turneth man to destruction; and reverence the voice which utters these words: “Return, ye children of men.” It is a comforting reflection, that adversity cometh not from the dust; and that sorrow springeth not from the ground. And, as to the removal of our friends by death, what can be more certain than the hand of God, in so mournful an event?

LET such, therefore, as have been more lately visited with this calamity, call up to view its sovereign

reign author. Consider the character of that being, who has appointed the bounds, which we cannot pass. Dare not to dispute his right to dissolve the nearest connexions of life ; and to destroy the hope of man. Resolve, with the psalmist, to be dumb, and to open not your mouths, because it is his doing. But refrain only from murmuring and complaints ; for in prayer, you have liberty to express your desires ; and may be assured, that you will not plead in vain. In the pathetic language of David, address yourselves to the great God : " Remove thy stroke from us, for we are consumed by the blow of thine hand. Hear our prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto our cry : hold not our peace at our tears ; for we are strangers with thee, and sojourners, as all our fathers were." Imitate the piety, the benevolence, and the pure and undefiled religion, which adorned the person, whose death you now regret. And to your prayers, unite your endeavours to be " followers of those, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises." As an inexhaustible source of consolation, reflect on the joys and honours of the heavenly state. And apply to yourselves those words of our glorious Redeemer : " Be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world."

Sermon XX.

On Candour.

ROMANS XIV. 4.

“WHO ART THOU THAT JUDGEST ANOTHER MAN’S SERVANT? TO HIS OWN MASTER HE STANDETH OR FALLETH.”

THERE is no fault to which Christians are more addicted, than to that, against which we are cautioned in these words. From the behaviour of too many, who make a public profession of religion, we might conclude, that the Saviour had given them powers to inspect and condemn the behaviour of others; and that their duty principally consisted in the execution of this office. But if we consult the gospel, we shall find, that nothing is more frequently, or more strictly prohibited, than this unrighteous practice. Our Saviour bears testimony against it in the plainest terms. And with great propriety, the apostle inquires, “who art thou that judgest another man’s servant?” adding, that we are all responsible to Christ, and must hereafter stand or fall according to his sentence. This is a consideration of infinite moment. And if we oftener adverted to it, we could not indulge ourselves in a liberty, so contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and so pointedly reprov’d, both by the preaching and example of its author.

THE special occasion of the admonition in the text, was a dispute among the early Christians, respecting the use of meats. One supposed, that he might eat
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all things : another, who had a more scrupulous conscience, presumed that he was at liberty to eat only herbs. This diversity of sentiment produced very disagreeable consequences. The liberal Christian looked with contempt on his weaker brother. Whilst, on the other hand, the latter beheld, with indignation, the liberty taken by the former ; and passed sentence on his indiscriminate use of meats, as an offence against the gospel. The apostle informs them both, that they had mistaken the true spirit of Christianity. On the rational believer, he enjoins a benevolent regard to the feelings of others. And he cautions the scrupulous Christian against rash censuring, and invading the province of one, to whom God had committed the judgment of the world. His words are these : " Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not : and let not him who eateth not, judge him who eateth : for God hath received him." The text follows, " who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? to his own master he standeth or falleth."

You perceive, from this representation, that even the first Christians were not free from religious disputes. And you cannot but remark, that even so trifling a circumstance, as the use of meats, has been sufficient to disturb the unity of the spirit ; and, at least, to weaken the bands of love. And the same inconsistencies have dishonoured the Christian character, from the apostolick age to the present time. Christians have disputed with each other ; have mutually despised, hated, and persecuted, for points, which no human mind could comprehend ; and which no human authority could decide. These abuses of the most benevolent religion, that was ever proposed to mankind, have been an unspeakable injury to

to the cause. They have filled the christian world with scandals. They have furnished weapons to the enemies of the truth : and they have rendered the history of the church one of the most unpleasing narratives that can be perused.

THAT we may not repeat the wounds, which Christianity has received, I have made choice of the admonition of the apostle, as the subject of this discourse. And I shall endeavour, first, to explain, and, secondly, to enforce it, upon all who profess to wish well to religion.

FIRST—The apostle inquires, who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? We are all servants of Christ : and the question is, whether judging, in all cases, is contrary to the gospel. It is impossible not to form some opinion of our fellow-men, when we inspect their actions. To think equally well of different characters, when we are thoroughly acquainted with them, is not in the power of any discerning person. And, least of all, can we acquit the man, whose whole conduct is a disavowal of his professions. In these cases, we cannot avoid judging. Some sentence we shall necessarily pass in our own minds. For which reason, the words before us are not to be taken in their most rigid sense. To avoid obscurity, it may be expedient to show what is *not* prohibited in the text.

AND we may be certain, that there is nothing criminal in paying some attention to the actions of others ; and forming some judgment of their principles and motives. Nothing that is absolutely unavoidable, can be morally wrong. We cannot forbear to think according to plain evidence : we cannot resist the testimony of our senses ; nor can we contend with actual experience. When we see men
uniformly

uniformly act a wicked part ; when we detect them in dishonest practices ; when we are eye-witnesses of their immorality, it is impossible not to form an opinion to their disadvantage. We must condemn them in our hearts. Our opinion we may, indeed, keep to ourselves : but an unfavourable judgment, in such a case, will force itself on the mind.

FURTHER—As we are not in duty bound to think well of a grossly immoral character, neither are we obliged always to conceal our disapprobation. There are times, when every man of principle ought to bear open testimony against wickedness. It is a false delicacy to be silent, when the honour of God, the good of society, or the credit of our profession, may demand an explanation of our sentiments. An independence of character should be the ambition of every Christian. “ There is a fear of man that bringeth a snare.” And sometimes that fear imposes silence, to the great prejudice of truth, and to the dishonour of our profession.

AGAIN—The text does not condemn friendly admonition and reproof. So far from being an offence against christian charity, this is one of its genuine fruits. Even under the law, it was expressly enjoined : “ Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart ; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.” And it is evidently the design of the gospel, that Christians should inspect the conduct of each other ; that they should condemn those practices, which injure the common cause ; and admonish all, who walk unworthily of their religious profession. This is an indispensable duty. And we bind ourselves to the faithful discharge of it, as often as we commune with each other.

LASTLY

LASTLY—The words of the apostle cannot be interpreted as a prohibition of public judgment. It would not be just reasoning to say, there is a tribunal, before which we must all appear ; and a judge, by whose sentence we must stand or fall. Wherefore, let all human actions be referred to that tribunal. Society could not exist upon such principles. There must be such an order of men as human judges. They are the appointment of God himself. And by a faithful discharge of the duties of their office, the peace of society is maintained ; evil-doers are punished ; and protection is afforded to such as do well. It is plain, therefore, that the powers, exercised by the judges of the earth, do not fall under the prohibition of the gospel.

THE practice, reprov'd by the apostle, is evidently that of rash censuring and judging ; that of condemning our neighbours without being properly acquainted with circumstances ; of ascribing their actions to the worst motives ; of vilifying them on account of their principles ; and drawing from them the most unfavourable consequences. This treatment our Lord experienced, from the time of his first appearance in public, till he finished his life on the cross. Nothing could exceed the freedoms taken with his sacred character. His words and actions were watched with a malicious attention. And the scribes and pharisees never failed to assign the worst reason for every doctrine which he taught ; and every work which he performed. Did he observe the laws of civility towards publicans and sinners, he was then their companion and friend. Did he speak of his divine mission, he was then an impostor. Did he style God his father, he was then a blasphemer. Did he discourse on the subject of religious freedom, he was then

then an enemy to Cesar. Did he exert his miraculous power on any miserable object, he was then an agent of the devil. The worst colouring was given to every thing said and done by the blessed Jesus. Nor was it possible, by the most holy and blameless manners, to escape the condemning sentence of men, so malignant and censorious as the scribes and pharisees. In these hypocrites, we, therefore, have a striking view of the peculiar temper and practice condemned by the apostle. And the experience of such ill usage might lead our Saviour to caution his followers so frequently, and with so much earnestness, against this great transgression. The subject is introduced into his divine sermon. "Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

HAPPY would it have been for his followers, if they had profited by his lesson. But, so early as the days of the apostle, we perceive Christians acting in opposition to this divine rule. The distinction of meats, as I have already observed, roused some unamiable passions. By liberal Christians on one side, and scrupulous ones on the other, many censures were passed, which could not be reconciled with the meekness and mutual forbearance, required by the gospel.

AND how far we are imitators of their example, will readily appear, if we attend to the following considerations. First, it is rash and uncharitable judging, to pronounce any one criminal for his private religious opinions. The weakness of the human mind subjects it to numberless errors. And as long as we continue in this imperfect state, we shall have different sentiments in regard to points of mere speculation.

nation. We ought, therefore, to bear with each other. We should remember, that many opinions float about in the mind, without ever descending to the heart, or having any influence on the temper and life. And we should reflect, how possible it is, that a change of circumstances might have produced a change of sentiments.

THE admonition in the text is addressed, then, to those, who esteem a difference of opinion a sufficient reason for condemning their fellow-christians. To such uncharitable persons, the apostle would say, "who are you, that take upon yourselves to execute an office, which belongs only to the searcher of hearts? Are you infallible? Have you such a perfect confidence in your own understandings, as to be certain that all who differ from you, differ from the gospel? Till you are placed beyond the reach of error yourselves, be careful how you pass sentence on the mistakes of others. A better acquaintance with your own hearts, would inspire a more benevolent spirit; and would lead you to exercise more forbearance towards your neighbours.

SECONDLY—We are reprov'd in the text, not only when we condemn others for their opinions, but when we draw from them consequences, which they solemnly disavow. And how common is this species of injustice? Because persons have rejected good works as the meritorious ground of acceptance, how often have they been charged with encouraging licentiousness? Because they have maintained the moral inability of man, how often have they been accused of frustrating the laws of Christ, and denying their obligation? Because the doctrine of human depravity, the divine decrees, and other points equally mysterious, have been embraced as evangelical truths,

truths, how unfairly has the conclusion been drawn, that such persons must have blasphemous ideas of the blessed God? And, on the other hand, because Christians have had different views of the moral powers and final destination of man, of the divine government, of good works, and the result of Christ's mediation, how injurious the insinuation, that such persons are infidels in their hearts, and aim at the subversion of the gospel? May not a Christian believe, that works of piety and virtue are necessary as a qualification, without being an equivalent, for eternal happiness? May he not believe that man is a free agent, without denying his dependence on God, and his obligations to his grace? May he not entertain the most sublime ideas of Christ, and of the final consequences of his death, with respect to the human species, without inspiring one hope of salvation, whilst men continue in their sins? If this is possible, how uncharitable is it, to draw conclusions from principles, which they, who hold those principles, reject with detestation?

EXPERIENCE and observation prove, that opinions have not that influence over the temper and actions, which we should be ready to imagine. We find excellent Christians among all denominations. The man, who professes to build his future hopes upon a principle of faith, will still be careful to maintain good works. And he, who ascribes a greater efficacy to works, will nevertheless admit the indispensable necessity of faith, and will entertain the most exalted ideas of the grace of God, and the interposition of his Son. He that believes in unconditional election, will endeavour to make his calling and election sure. And he who professes to believe, that his future condition was predetermined before the world began, will

will still endeavour to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Among Christians, whose creed may appear contracted, we often find a most enlarged benevolence of heart. And among liberal Christians, it is not uncommon to find the most becoming seriousness, purity, and habitual devotion. These facts should make us careful of judging others. And on no occasion whatever, should we allow ourselves to draw conclusions from their principles, which they absolutely disavow in words, and contradict by the uniform tenor of their lives.

FINALLY—We stand reprov'd by the apostle, when we judge others, without being acquainted with circumstances; and when we impute to a bad motive, actions which are capable of a fair construction. This was not the spirit of Christ; nor is it that of the gospel. Christianity obliges us to think favourably of every person, till facts appear to the disadvantage of his character. In the production of all human actions, there may be a concurrence of many motives. Some of our most splendid actions may arise in part from our original constitution: and many actions, immoral in their form, may have been the effect of surprise, inattention, or some constitutional infirmity. Though no excuse can be made, and no charity exercised, where there is open, habitual, and deliberate wickedness; caution, therefore, is to be observed, where a single action comes before us. And if it be possible to reconcile it with a general goodness of heart, the benevolence of the gospel obliges us to do it. For how much, then, have those to answer, who always see things in the most unfavourable light; and rashly condemn, where they might charitably excuse.

THE foregoing remarks will point out the true spirit

spirit and meaning of the admonition in the text. The reason, which follows, deserves our most serious attention. Having inquired, "who art thou that judgest another man's servant," the apostle adds, "to his own master, he standeth or falleth." Our master is Christ. As a reward of his obedience to death, God hath highly exalted him; invested him with all power in heaven and earth; and constituted him judge of the world. And to him we must all answer for the opinions, which we have believed; for the habits, which we have contracted; for the words, which we have uttered; and for the actions, which we have performed. Accordingly, the apostle argues, "why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

He, who once appeared as our instructor, example, and redeemer, will hereafter appear in the more glorious character of our judge. And as his merit entitles him, so his acquaintance with human nature sufficiently qualifies him, to discharge this office. For these reasons, we ought to leave his servants to stand or fall by his decision. Do others entertain opinions, which we esteem erroneous? Whether they are such, we must leave to his determination: and whether their heads or hearts be most in fault, must likewise be submitted to our blessed master. We are fallible, but he is not. He searches the hearts; and he is perfectly acquainted with the human understanding, its powers, its weaknesses, its prejudices, and its various infirmities. Those, whom we condemn, may, therefore, appeal to a higher authority. And we cannot reasonably doubt, that many sentences pronounced by us, will be reversed by our wise and righteous judge.

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AND, in like manner, as the opinions, so the motives of our fellow-christians, and their principles of action, must be submitted to him. In many cases, we want that information, which is necessary, to guide our judgment. But all things are known to our Saviour : every spring of action is visible to his eye ; and how far the motives, which influenced the agent, can be reconciled with the principles of Christianity, no one can determine, but the author of that religion. That the Son of God is our constituted judge, is, therefore, a sufficient reason that we should not officiously judge one another.

LET us then, to apply the subject, carefully avoid this great transgression. Let us accustom ourselves to reflect, that nothing can less consist with the christian character, than a bitter, censorious spirit. Let us watch over ourselves, lest, at any time, we indulge a temper which the gospel reprobates, and which Christ and the apostles prohibited in the most pointed terms. Let us remember our incompetence to judge in many cases, which may occur. And let us continually ask our hearts, whether, upon a change of circumstances with others, we might not have entertained their opinions, and been governed by their principles. This question, frequently and solemnly proposed, would have a good effect. It would greatly check a censorious spirit, and it would enforce the admonition of the apostle.

CAREFULLY to examine, and severely to judge ourselves, would likewise have a happy tendency. The reason why many are so very censorious, is because they never look into their own hearts. More attention to themselves, would lead them to be more just to others. And this is certain, that the best Christian will, upon inspection, be so dissatisfied with himself,

himself, as to reserve his censures for his own misconduct.

FINALLY—Let us bear in mind the future appearance of our blessed master; and the account which we must then give. To him we must answer for all our thoughts, words, and actions: and before the same tribunal will all our fellow-christians be cited. And what will then be our confusion, should we hear those applauded, whom we had condemned; those pronounced blessed, whom we had pronounced accursed; those invited into the kingdom of heaven, whom we had sentenced to the place of punishment? After such injurious conduct towards the servants, how should we dare to meet the eye of the master? To avoid such confusion, let us abstain from the offence. And inasmuch as we shall have judgment without mercy, if we now refuse mercy; let us resolve to live in the continual exercise of charity, knowing that this heavenly virtue will cover a multitude of sins.

Sermon XXI.

On the Compassion of Christ.

JOHN XI. 35.

“JESUS WEPT.”

OUR blessed Saviour, when on earth, formed a very intimate connexion with Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus. The latter, during the absence of his heavenly friend, being seized with some

some alarming disorder, the sisters "sent unto Jesus, saying, behold he, whom thou lovest, is sick."—"When Jesus heard that, he said, this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Instead of hastening, therefore, to his friends, "he abode two days still in the place where he then was." "Then, after that, saith he to his disciples, let us go into Judea again." This proposal met with their instant disapprobation; and they used every argument to dissuade their master from exposing his life to the malice of the Jews: for, it seems, they did not yet understand for what purpose he came into the world. To reconcile them to this measure, Jesus was under the necessity of informing them that Lazarus was dead; and that the object of his visit was to restore him to life. This information silenced every objection; and the disciples readily consented to accompany their master.

DRAWING near to Bethany, Martha went out to meet Jesus; and, as soon as she saw him, she said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But with a faith, which did her great honour, she added, "I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Jesus replied, "thy brother shall rise again." To this she readily assented, supposing, however, that he meant at the resurrection day. But Jesus gave her to understand, that he would immediately accomplish his promise. Upon this, she ran and called her sister, who, seeing the compassionate Saviour, fell at his feet, and said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." "When Jesus, therefore, saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping, who came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled. And said, where have ye laid him? They say

say unto him, Lord, come and see. *Jesus wept.*—Such is the story, of which the words in the text are a very striking part. Its sequel is well known. Christ went to the grave; and there, in the presence of many spectators, restored his friend to life. So stupendous a miracle was not without its effect. It convinced the friends of his unfeigned affection.—It convinced some of the Jews of his divine mission. And it greatly strengthened the faith of his disciples.

THE resurrection of Lazarus is one of the most wonderful works, which our Saviour ever performed. Hence, it has been thought strange, that John only should introduce it into his narrative. He, indeed, has related it with a simplicity of style, a minuteness, and a brevity, which are highly pleasing. But how shall we account for the silence of the other historians? Was this miracle unknown to them? or had they private reasons for making no particular mention of it?

To solve this difficulty, some have said, that none of the evangelists ever aimed at giving a complete account of all our Saviour's miracles. This is an undoubted fact; but it does not reach the difficulty. For, if you examine, you will find, that they have given a joint account of miracles, by no means to be compared with this. The best solution that I have met with, is suggested by a modern writer of great eminence, whose words are—"It deserves particularly to be attended to, that the evangelists must have felt a singular delicacy with respect to this miracle. First, because it was a miracle performed on a *friend*, in a family with which our Saviour was intimate. And, secondly, because Lazarus might be living at the time the three first evangelists wrote their gospels, and might be subjected

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“to great inconveniences by having his name mentioned as the subject of such a miracle. This, however, was a reason, which cannot be supposed to have existed when John wrote. There was a tradition among the fathers, that Lazarus lived thirty years after his resurrection; and John did not write his gospel till at least forty or fifty years afterwards. Lazarus, therefore, most probably was then not alive: and John, for this reason, must have been more at liberty to give an account of his resurrection.” Every one will judge of this reasoning; and give it the weight which it deserves.

THE distress, which Jesus manifested, as he approached the grave of his friend, is the subject of this discourse. We read, not only that he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, but also, that he honoured the tomb of Lazarus with his tears. This would be easily accounted for, had the loss been irreparable. Had Jesus been then conscious, that he was going, in all probability, to make an unsuccessful attempt to raise his friend, we could not wonder if he paid this tribute to his memory. But the very reverse of this was the truth. Jesus knew that Lazarus would come forth at his word. He predicted this event, when first apprised of his death. “Our friend,” said he to his disciples, “sleepeth, but I go to wake him out of his sleep.” When he saw the weeping relatives, he assured them that he should rise again. And when he came to the tomb, “he lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me; and I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people, which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.” From all these passages it

it appears, that Jesus well knew the consequences of this visit. He knew that he should soon restore him to his friends, to their great joy, and to the astonishment of all the spectators. Whence then his grief? Might we not rather have expected the greatest elevation of spirits, upon the near prospect of glorifying his heavenly Father, by a stupendous miracle, confirming his religion, establishing the faith of his disciples, and doing the highest possible favour to his friends? Surely this had been a natural expectation. Yet, so far from appearing elated on the occasion, we are positively assured, that *Jesus wept*! The question is, what called forth the tears of our blessed Saviour? And how are we to improve this affecting part of his example?

AND, first—It is reasonable to think, that the extreme anguish of his friends, and the sympathizing sorrow of the Jews, who came to weep with them, might call forth the tears of the Son of God. The distress of others produces an instant effect upon the truly tender and feeling mind. There is no reflection in the case: the effect is, in a manner, mechanical. When persons of that amiable sensibility, which sometimes adorns human nature, are only accidental spectators of sorrow, they cannot remain unmoved. They have a tear for every wo; and a pang for every son and daughter of affliction. Our Saviour was, without dispute, possessed of this sensibility in the highest degree. Himself trained in the school of adversity, he knew what it was to suffer, and had learned how to pity. Seeing, therefore, his best friends in deep distress, he shared their anguish. Their grief melted him into tears. He knew, indeed, that it would soon be turned to joy: still, however, he mourned with them, because they suffered

ferred at the time ; and because he could easily conceive what they had endured before his coming. The constitution of human nature, of which our Lord, when on earth, was a partaker, will, therefore, account both for his sorrow of heart, and for those expressions of it, which are mentioned in the text, And it is delightful to reflect, that we have a high priest, who can sympathize with us, having passed through a sad variety of calamities ; having mourned as we mourn ; and experienced all that a humane heart, unconscious of guilt, and incapable of remorse, could suffer.

SECONDLY—Our Lord might weep at the sad recollection of the miseries brought upon mankind by the apostacy. We are informed, that “by one man sin came into the world, and death by sin, and that death hath passed upon all.” And if we turn to the mosaic account of the fall, we shall find this representation particularly explained and confirmed. Our Saviour, therefore, might be melted into tears at that view of human mortality, to which he might be led by the death of his friend. Circumstanced as he then was, the reflection would be natural. We may suppose that his thoughts took the following turn. These are the mournful consequences of the first act of disobedience. Unhappy day, when the parents of mankind brought death into the world, that source of woe. In consequence of their transgression, the sentence, “dust thou art, and unto dust thou must return,” is put in execution upon all their posterity. Melancholy catastrophe ! Awful monument of the divine displeasure ! Who can take a view of the wide ruin, and not drop a compassionate tear over the various miseries of mortal men !

BUT, thirdly—His own approaching crucifixion might

might add to our Lord's distress. He was now going to Jerusalem, where he knew he should suffer the most excruciating and infamous punishment. And it appears from our Lord's agony in the garden, that he had very formidable apprehensions of the death, to which he was appointed. Perhaps, he was of a very tender and delicate frame. That he had a great share of sensibility, is most certain. And knowing more than we do, he might be able to form a better idea of the anguish of the cross. When, therefore, he approached the tomb of his friend, the apprehensions of his own death might mingle themselves with his other sorrowful reflections. He might, at that moment, think what he should soon endure. The accursed death of the cross might present itself to his imagination. And melted, as he was, with the sorrows of his friends, he might cast one glance of pity upon himself. This will appear at least possible, if we follow him to the garden of Gethsemane. We there find him in an agony. "My soul," saith he, "is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." And we are further informed, that his "sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." All this indicates such a degree of sensibility, as to render the supposition above, at least, possible. And it was wisely ordered, that Christ should feel so much, in order to accommodate his example to mankind; and render it more worthy of our imitation.

FOURTHLY—Christ might weep at the apprehension of certain consequences, which, he knew, would follow the miracle, which he was about to work. Among the spectators, were not only the relatives of Lazarus, but many Jews, who came to sympathize with

with them. These, upon seeing the miracle, were divided in their sentiments respecting its author. Many of them believed. But some there were, "who went their way to the pharisees, and told them what Jesus had done." These, it is reasonable to think, not only remained in a state of infidelity, but cheerfully improved this opportunity to accuse him to his enemies. A more melancholy sight there cannot be, than stubborn and malicious unbelief. When men become hardened by the very means which are used for their conviction, their case is deplorable. Their guilt will be measured by their obstinacy, and they may expect an aggravated condemnation.

How great, then, the crime of those, who saw Lazarus come forth, and yet made no other improvement of such a stupendous act of power, than to accuse Jesus to his enemies? Their stubbornness, our Lord foresaw. And it is very conceivable, that his tears flowed the more plentifully on this account. They, it seems, would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. What then remained for them, but to go on, opposing the truth, till their infidelity should become their ruin. This, no doubt, was eventually their fate. And foreseeing it, our Lord might be melted at the prospect.

FINALLY—It is probable, Jesus wept from a presentiment of the dreadful ruin, which was soon to overtake the whole Jewish nation. When informed of the resurrection of Lazarus, the chief priests and pharisees immediately gathered a council. "What do we, said they, for this man doeth many miracles? If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." This, which was indeed just reasoning, suggested a proposal, that Jesus should die. "Then, from that day forth, they took counsel together to put

put him to death." The resurrection of Lazarus was so great a miracle, and so well attested, that the Jews could not deny his supernatural powers. They, therefore, resolved to put a stop to the growing evil, as they impiously esteemed the fame of Christ, and the success attending his ministry. One measure devised by them was, to put Lazarus to death. But at length, they determined upon the destruction of his restorer. This resolution they carried into effect. And the murder of Christ was revenged by the utter ruin of their city and nation. No persons were ever punished in a more terrible manner than the Jews. The numbers, that perished by the sword, can scarcely be credited at this day. Irritated to a high degree, by their unprovoked rebellion, the Romans wrapt both their city and temple in flames. And to extinguish all hope of rebuilding on that sacred spot, the very foundations were ploughed up, and a Gentile colony planted in the neighbourhood.

ALL these events, our blessed master clearly foresaw. Beholding the devoted city, he had before wept over it. And now, calling to mind the stores of divine wrath ready to burst upon them, he could not, whilst he lamented the obstinacy of the Jews, but bewail their fate. He saw them slain by the sword, or led in triumph as slaves and captives. He saw his father's house in flames; and not one stone of that sacred and costly building left upon another. He saw the Jews scattered over the face of the earth, and vainly dreaming of a future Messiah. Connecting these events with his own death, and his death with the stupendous miracle, which he was about to work, the subject affected him in the manner described in the text.

Thus have we seen the cause of those tears, which
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our Saviour shed on this solemn occasion. He wept, because he saw his friends weeping. He wept at the miseries and mortality of mankind. He wept, perhaps, at the prospect of his own painful and ignominious death. He wept at the hardness and malignity of heart, which he discerned among some of the spectators. And he wept at the overwhelming ruin, which he knew would soon punish the infidelity of the Jews. These were sufficient to melt a heart so tender and compassionate as that of our Saviour.

FROM this subject, we learn the excellency of a compassionate temper. Many persons pretend to regard the tender passions as a mark of weakness. Ambitious of being considered as stoics and philosophers, they disdain to be moved on any occasion. But why need we be ashamed of that sensibility, which enables us to "rejoice with them who rejoice, and weep with them who weep." Have not the bravest heroes, and the most eminent saints, possessed a large share of it? Are they not frequently painted in tears? Abraham was a brave and a good man; yet we read, that he mourned and wept. Joseph, David, and Jonathan, also, were no strangers to the same emotions. Hezekiah and Jeremiah wept sore. And even that great Christian hero, St. Paul, frequently shed tears, if not on his own personal account, yet out of compassion to others. We need not, therefore, be ashamed to resemble such distinguished characters. Should the same disposition be in us, which was also in Christ, we shall not be disgraced. We learn no stoical maxims, either from the gospel, or its author. One great object of that divine religion, is to improve the benevolence of our nature; and to render us more compassionate and feeling. So far, then, from endeavouring to extinguish,

guish, let us cultivate the tender passions. Let us learn both to share the joys and griefs of others. And let us ever regard a compassionate sensibility as one of the most amiable parts in the constitution of human nature. The more we resemble Christ in this respect, the better we shall be. And though a great degree of compassion may open our bosoms to many present wounds, yet it will qualify us for superior blessedness in the world to come.

SECONDLY—We learn from the subject before us, that perfect goodness will not ensure perfect felicity. Our Saviour did no sin. Neither in thought, word, or deed, did he ever transgress a law of his heavenly father. Yet he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. In the days of his flesh, he poured out many tears. His disciples, therefore, are not to be discouraged, if they sometimes suffer adversity. It is impossible for any man to live in this world, without being a spectator of many distressing scenes. The Christian can least expect it. For this reason, he should prepare himself, as to rejoice, so to mourn.

FINALLY—Though our Lord once wept, he weeps no more. His sufferings are at an end. At the right hand of God, he enjoys the perfection of glory and blessedness: and the same glory and blessedness shall we share, if his mind be in us, and we be careful to walk as he walked. Let us, then, often look forward to those good things, which he hath prepared for them who love him. Let us reflect on the felicity of those, who shall have a part in the first resurrection. And, above all things, let us endeavour so to behave here below, that when we sail here, we may be received into eternal habitations. Admitted to the kingdom of our father, we shall know neither sorrow, nor sighing, nor any more pain. Old things

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having passed away, and all become new, we shall have all tears wiped from our eyes: God will be our God: and we shall be immortally happy in his presence and favour.

With these expectations, I would particularly wish to console any mourners in this assembly. It is always painful to lose our friends, even when we have reason to think that life was a burden, and they were ardently desirous to be gone. But if we believe in the gospel, we cannot sorrow as those who are without hope. To a good Christian, death is unspeakable gain. Wherefore, let us rather improve the death of such, as a memento of our own mortality. Let us be excited to increasing diligence in our master's work: and having finished our course, we shall join those, who have gone before; and dwell forever with the Lord.

Sermon XXII.

On the Patience of Christ.

HEBREWS XII. 3.

“FOR CONSIDER HIM, WHO ENDURED SUCH CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS AGAINST HIMSELF, LEST YE BE WEARIED AND FAINT IN YOUR MINDS.”

HOW natural is it to suppose, in the hour of affliction, that our trials are uncommonly great; and that our condition would authorize the plaintive strains of the prophet, “is it nothing to you, all ye

ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." When depressed by suffering, it is the infirmity, even of the best men, to fall into these reflections. That the Hebrew Christians might not imagine that their troubles were unexampled, the author of this epistle calls their attention to a very interesting period of their history. He reminds them of many heroic sufferers for conscience' sake; and he describes their persecution in the following strains: "They had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about, destitute, afflicted, tormented." These eminently great and good men, he represents as present with their christian successors, and applauding spectators of their firmness. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." The sufferings of others suggested to the mind of the writer; the humiliation of our blessed Saviour. Melted with the affecting scene, he therefore proceeds: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The text follows: "For consider him, that endured such contradiction of sinners, against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." To point out the connexion of these words; and to impress the truth contained in them, I would offer the following paraphrase. You may possibly think, that, in consequence of the persecutions of your unbelieving neighbours,

neighbours, your lot is hard, beyond example. But do not entertain the thought. Other good men have suffered before you. And if you reflect on the divine author of your religion, you will find, that your afflictions will admit of no comparison with his. For your encouragement, therefore, withdraw your attention from other objects; and think only of him, who has called you to this glorious enterprise. His example will animate, and his religion will support you, till your conflict shall be over. He is now, indeed, enthroned at the right hand of his heavenly father; but previously to his elevation, he endured the agonies of the cross, and the infamy of a public execution. The deepest humiliation preceded his admission to that world, where only such consummate goodness could receive an adequate reward. Believing his divine religion, do you dwell, with admiration, on his glorious character. Consider the dignity of his nature, and the severity of his sufferings: then will you be prepared for any conflict, to which the honour of your Saviour, and the interests of his religion, may call you. With such an example before your eyes, you cannot grow weary and faint in your minds.

THE words, thus explained, may be considered as a lesson of instruction to all, who bear the denomination of Christians. That we may convert them to our own advantage, I shall, first, remark, that it is possible, we may grow weary and faint in our minds. To prevent which, I would recommend, secondly, the habitual contemplation of Christ, and more particularly the temper, with which he endured the contradiction of sinners.

FIRST—Though we do not live in an age of religious persecution, yet we have our trials; and, under those

those trials, we may grow weary and faint in our minds. It is evidently the design of God, that the sufferings of this state should prepare us for the joys of another. Such is the imperfection of our nature, that trouble in some form, and to a certain degree, is necessary. Hence, when we are not under the pressure of real evils, those which are imaginary will supply their place. For which reason, all expectations of pure enjoyment, on this side the grave, if we are so extravagant as to form them, must end in disappointment.

BUT, as a portion of trouble is the lot of all, so it is the misfortune of some to grow weary and faint. They do not contemplate the all-disposing providence of God in the course of events. The consummate wisdom, and perfect benevolence, agreeably to which the divine government is conducted, are not realized by them. They do not advert to the end of trouble. Hence the complaints, which sometimes escape their unguarded lips, and the uneasy state of their minds, when their enjoyments are interrupted.

Do they experience unkind usage from the world? they are strongly tempted to retire from it in disgust. Are offices of friendship overlooked? they are ready to form the fatal resolution to desist from those offices. Is the good, which they have done to those who stood in need of their assistance, repaid with evil? in a moment of indignation, they are tempted to repent of their kindness, and to resolve to do good no more. Have offences, often forgiven, been wickedly repeated? they have grown weary of one of the most amiable of all the christian virtues. In their temporal pursuits, though conducted with fairness and honesty, have they been unsuccessful? they have been strongly inclined to call in question the excellency of
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truth and justice, and the policy of doing to others, as they would that others should do to them. Notwithstanding the rectitude of their hearts, and the innocency of their lives, have their virtues been disputed, their character slandered, or their good been evil-spoken of? They have perceived the vanity of all attempts to commend themselves to the consciences of all in the sight of God; and have been filled with wonder, that such a rule was ever prescribed by the Saviour of men. Comparing their lot in the world with that of others; seeing men, who are open confessors of God and religion, in great outward prosperity, when *they* are in adversity; seeing them in affluence, whilst they themselves are in want; seeing the ingrateful and disobedient in honour, whilst *they*, with the most opposite principles, are in obscurity; in a word, seeing good and evil dispensed in a manner so contrary to their expectations, have their minds been often perplexed, and their resolutions discouraged! perplexity has degenerated into faintness of mind; and discouragement, as to the efficacy of moral virtue, has terminated in despair.

In illustration of this sentiment, I would refer you to the ingenuous confession of Asaph, which may be considered as a just description of the human heart. "Truly," he exclaims, "God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He afterwards proceeds: "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, who increase in riches! Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long, have I been afflicted, and chastened every morning." What language

language could better describe the weariness and faintness of mind, which some good men have experienced, when they have seen others enjoy that, which they had considered as their own portion?

CONTRADICTION of sinners is the only evil specified in the text: and, it is true, nothing is more discouraging than base and ingrateful treatment. But, from the observations already made, it appears, that discouragement, as to the prosecution of a virtuous course, may grow out of every species of affliction. As ingratitude may render us weary of doing good; repeated injuries, of exercising forgiveness; studied insults, of practising forbearance; unmerited censure, of deserving well of the world; so the insufficiency of christian virtue to command riches, honour, power, health, fame, and, to sum up all in one word, outward prosperity, may diminish our reverence of it, and our zeal to walk according to its most sacred and immutable laws. I would not be understood, that disappointment will justify, or even extenuate, a weariness of mind, where duty is concerned; but that it is often productive of this undesirable effect.

It is a doctrine of religion, that all things are benevolently intended; and that afflictions, in their several kinds and degrees, will work together for good, unless it be our own fault. The various wrongs, of which our fellow-men are the visible cause; and those calamities, which proceed more immediately from God, are appointed for the same ends, namely, our improvement in piety and virtue. But, that which is good in design, may become evil in effect. Hence, those very trials, which, if they had their full operation, would bring forth in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness, may be the fatal cause of alienating our minds from God and our duty,

duty, and may unfit us for a state, for which they were designed to prepare us.

HAVING thus examined the evil, against which we are cautioned in the text, I now proceed, in the second place, to the remedy which is there proposed : namely, the habitual contemplation of the Son of God, and, more particularly, of the temper displayed by him during the whole period of his humiliation. "Consider him," says the apostle, "who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." In perusing the history of Christ, we find not any one fact better attested, than that which is taken for granted in this exhortation. The Saviour of the world was, indeed, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And his severest afflictions arose from the ingratitude and injustice of those, whom he came to redeem and save. So far from being won by his kindness, convinced by his arguments, allured by his promises, or alarmed by his threatenings, they became hardened by those very measures, which were employed to persuade and reclaim them.

WHEN the great instructor of mankind spake with authority, and not as the scribes, to many who heard him, he spake in vain. When he explained the law of Moses, and rescued it from the absurd comments of its boasted teachers, he was reproached as an enemy to the established religion. When he taught men justice, mercy, and the love of God ; and exalted the substance of religion above its forms, he was accused of impiety. When he asserted his divine mission, he was represented as a deceiver and impostor ; and when, in confirmation of it, he appealed to miracles, wonders, and signs, he was criminated as an agent of satan ; and his works were ascribed to that malignant being, who actuates the children of disobedience.

disobedience. When he revealed the arts of the scribes and pharisees ; and set before the people the many impositions, which were practised on them, he made the former his implacable enemies, without rendering the latter his friends. Hence, when the rulers conspired, the people clamorously demanded his destruction. Nor did they demand it in vain ; for the Roman governor, overcome by their importunity, delivered up Jesus to the inflamed multitude, and their inveterate rulers. Then did the innocent Saviour endure every species of mortification, insult, and injury, which his enemies could invent. I need not attempt to describe his cruel mocking and scourging, or to expatiate on the affecting circumstances of his execution. The sacred historians have related his unmerited sufferings with that simplicity, which marks all their productions. From them we may learn, that his fate was as ignominious as his life was honourable ; that his death was as excruciating as his temper was amiable, and his virtue transcendent !

WITH how much reason, therefore, is his example proposed to his followers? When Pilate brought him forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe, he said to the enemies of Jesus, "behold the man." But, with equal propriety, may his friends be called to behold their divine master. If they wish to see that, which it ought to be their highest ambition to become, they cannot be more nobly employed than in the contemplation of their Saviour. Are you desirous to behold an example of the purest and most fervent devotion? consider Christ, he was a pattern of piety. Would you see justice and benevolence in their perfect form, and highest exercise? turn your eyes towards the friend of mankind. Would you contemplate purity, meek-

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ness, humility, and an absolute resignation of the will to that of our heavenly father? behold the author and finisher of your faith. Would you survey the religion of the gospel in all its splendor? consider him, by whom it was first communicated to mankind. What the Saviour preached, he uniformly practised. To understand his rules, we have, therefore, only to examine his life.

BUT to one part of our Saviour's character, our attention is more particularly directed in the words before us. As a pattern of piety, righteousness, and goodness, his example is very instructive: but we are now to consider him as a pattern of patience and forbearance. From the narrative of his life and sufferings, it appears, that the contradiction of sinners neither provoked revenge, nor discouraged his attempts to serve them. The many slanders, which were propagated by his enemies; the insults, which he personally received; the opposition, which he encountered; and the punishment, to which he was subjected, excited his compassion for the authors, but not his resentment. His memorable prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," is a proof, that, however his patience might be tried, his goodness could not be overcome.

In this point of view, his character may be contemplated with singular advantage. Never shall we be weary or faint in our minds, if we reflect on his trials, and the spirit with which he encountered them. Do we esteem it an evil to be overlooked by those, whose outward circumstances are more splendid than our own? Jesus Christ experienced the same neglect. Are our characters defamed? his was most outrageously traduced by the tongue of slander. Are our innocent, and even benevolent actions,

actions, converted into crimes? his did not escape censure. When we mean well, are the most unworthy motives and designs sometimes ascribed to us? how often did the Saviour experience this injustice? Do we ever complain of ingratitude from those, whom we have served with cheerfulness, and to our own injury? how much greater reason had the Son of God to utter this complaint? In time of adversity, have our friends forsaken us? when Christ was apprehended, all his disciples forsook him, and fled. Are the treachery of some, and the cowardice of others, a source of mortification to us? I need only call over the names of Judas and Peter, to remind you of what the Saviour suffered from the want of firmness, and the want of sincerity in some of his professed friends. Are we often rendered uneasy by our subjection to pain, sickness, and death? Jesus Christ came into the world to suffer the most excruciating pain, and ignominious death; and he knew his destination. In a word, do we esteem it a hardship to sacrifice ease, pleasure, or temporal interest to the cause of truth, and for the benefit of others? consider the Redeemer of the world: though rich, he, for our sake, became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich. Our wants, our miseries, our everlasting interests, occupied his mind: nor did he decline any hardship in the prosecution of our salvation.

WHEN we reflect on these truths, is it possible that we should complain of our lot, or sink under our troubles? When we have such an example before us, can we murmur or repine? Think of the conversation, which passed between our Lord and his fellow-sufferers. One, you may recollect, railed on him, saying, "if thou be the Christ, save thyself and us."

us." The other rebuked him in the following terms : " Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation ? and we, indeed, justly ; for we receive the due reward of our deeds : but this man has done nothing amiss." This remark would become our lips, when we are comparing our humiliation with that of our blessed master. By our many acts of disobedience, we have incurred the displeasure of God, and exposed ourselves to his judgments. It follows, therefore, that we deserve the evils which we suffer. They are the punishment of our sins ; and are intended to bring us to reflection. But Christ was without sin. He fulfilled all righteousness ; and as a perfectly innocent being, he received the divine approbation by a voice from heaven. If, then, one, with whom the father was pleased, suffered without repining, can we, who are objects of his just displeasure, show an impatient temper ? Ought not the conviction of our guilt to reconcile us to our troubles ? And if Christ endured, with firmness, an accumulation of evils, should we not call up all our resolution, lest we should grow weary and faint in our minds ? The perfection of his character, and the imperfection of ours, must enforce this lesson.

FURTHER—When we consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners, we should recollect as well the dignity as the innocence of the sufferer. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. But if so great a personage, when despised, hated, reproached, insulted, and maliciously persecuted, was patient and resigned, ought we not to copy his temper ? What says our Saviour himself ? " The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple, that he be
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as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household." This reasoning is applicable to all cases of adversity. The patience of Christ, when in a state of humiliation, should encourage us to endure affliction with firmness, and should fortify us against despair, whether our miseries arise from the passions of men, or the providence of God.

As an application of the subject, it remains to recommend to all, who respect the character of Christ, the steady contemplation of his example. How can the understanding be more entertained, or the heart more affected, than in surveying one, who was a pattern of moral excellence? What is there lovely, praise-worthy, or of good report, which was not exemplified by the Son of God? In whom were ever piety and benevolence, meekness and fortitude, purity and justice, so gloriously united? But, as a patient sufferer, he claims your highest admiration. Consider, therefore, Christ as a leader, whom you ought to follow, through trials and difficulties, dangers of every kind, and disgrace. Consider his patience when injured, his forbearance when insulted, his resignation, when he had not where to lay his head; and his firmness, when called to die for his religion. Consider these virtues with a view to copy them, when exercised with affliction, and tempted to think hard of God. If precepts guide, examples animate. From that of our divine master, we may, therefore, learn to rejoice in tribulation, and thus to verify our professions, and do honour to the gospel.

THE primitive Christians derived strength and courage from the example of their master. In imitation of him, they resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

fin. As they admired, so they copied his firmness and resignation, when in circumstances similar to his. To use their own language, they filled up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ; and having tasted of his cup, they will hereafter be glorified with him.

LET the same disposition distinguish all, who have assumed the name of Christians. Are you, at any time, in a state of adversity? learn of that illustrious sufferer, to justify the ways of God, and say with him, not our wills, but thine be done. Learn of him to forgive, and even to love your enemies. Learn of him to prefer your duty to your ease, your temporal interest, the favour of men, and the greatest good which this world can bestow. Thus intent to follow his example, and to display his temper, you will be prepared for that superior state, where immortal happiness will reward those, who have neither despised the chastening of the Lord, nor fainted when rebuked of him.

Sermon XXIII.

On the Resurrection of the Dead.

ACTS XXVI. 8.

“WHY SHOULD IT BE THOUGHT A THING INCREDIBLE WITH YOU, THAT GOD SHOULD RAISE THE DEAD?”

THIS question was proposed to Agrippa, before whom St. Paul was making his defence. Among the Jews, there were some who admitted, and others who

who denied, the doctrine of a resurrection. The pharisees maintained this point with great zeal, esteeming it the only ground of their future expectations. The sadducees, on the other hand, were infidels in regard to this article ; and declared, that, in their view, it was incredible that God should raise the dead. To which of these sects Agrippa belonged, it is not easy to determine from the context. But I think it highly probable that he was a sadducee, as the Herodian family were generally of that denomination. Men of their ambitious principles and immoral lives, would naturally embrace a system, which removed the most powerful restraint from the human mind ; and flattered the worst men with the hopes of impunity. This extraordinary sect derived its name from Sadoc, a celebrated teacher in the Jewish schools. The original doctrine was nothing more than this, that to serve God with a view to any future reward, is mean and selfish. Rejecting, therefore, heaven and happiness, as motives to obedience, they finally rejected them from their creed. And at the time, when the apostle uttered this discourse, the disciples of Sadoc were fully confirmed in this sentiment, that the existence of angels and spirits is the delusion of fancy ; and that God himself could not raise the dead. In opposition to this opinion, the apostle makes the inquiry in the text. He asks, why it should be thought incredible, that a being, possessed of such powers as the Deity, should be able to recover a dead body from the grave ; and to rekindle the spark of life.

AND it appears to me, that this is a question of infinite importance. For if there be no resurrection, then it follows that Christ has not risen : and if Christ be not risen, then every hope of futurity is extinguished.

extinguished. Before us is the dreary prospect of utter destruction ; and our friends, who have fallen asleep, are to awake no more. If we give up the resurrection, there is nothing to support our expectations of a future existence. From the metaphysical nature of the soul, we can argue nothing satisfactory. And the conclusion, drawn from the disorders of this present state, will not bear a rigid examination. If we hope to exist hereafter, we must build that hope upon the doctrine of a resurrection. The question then is, has God promised to raise the dead ; and is he able to do it ? Are his powers adequate to such an effect ? Or, is there something in the restoration of dead persons to life, which militates with the perfections of his nature, or implies a contradiction ? These are inquiries, which concern every one present. And as they shall be determined, so may we contemplate the grave with horror, or with satisfaction.

THAT we may be able, therefore, to form just ideas of this subject, I shall, first, consider the christian doctrine of a resurrection. And,

SECONDLY—I shall inquire, whether there be any thing in nature to render this doctrine incredible.

FIRST—The doctrine of a resurrection, as revealed in the gospel, deserves consideration. It is not asserted by the christian writers, that precisely the same body, which is laid in the dust, shall be raised at the last day. During its animation, the body is subject to continual changes. And it is asserted by those, who have studied the human frame, that an entire succession of new particles takes place at stated periods. We know that the bodies, which we now have, are very different from those, which we brought with us into the world. It is, therefore, conceivable, that the resurrection-body may essentially differ from the

the human structure, as it now stands. Something, which enters into our present composition, will certainly be raised. But to suppose that the same particles, which were deranged by death, will be collected from the dust; and that they will constitute our heavenly body, is an extravagance too great for any rational Christian.

THE apostle Paul has largely discussed the subject of a resurrection. In one of his sublimest productions, he compares the mortal body to a seed of wheat. And he intimates, that the body, which shall hereafter be, will differ as much from this body, as the springing blade from the seed committed to the ground. He, moreover, goes on to say, that there is a natural, and a spiritual body. And because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, he solemnly declares, that no such perishable materials shall enter into our celestial frame; but that it shall be sublimed to a state worthy an immortal resident. "It is sown," says he, "in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." In another place, he speaks of it as "fashioned like to our Saviour's glorious body." And borrowing the idea from his profession, as a tent-maker, St. Paul elsewhere observes, "we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." From these passages it appears, that the common, and, I may say, gross ideas of a resurrection, have no foundation in the sacred volume. It is not a doctrine of the gospel, that the tomb will give up every particle of dust, which has been treasured in it. What we learn from the inspired pages is this, that every one, who has, or

may hereafter, yield to the stroke of death, shall be raised from the dead. And as to the body, with which he shall come forth, it will be such as infinite wisdom has prepared for him ; and will be accommodated to his future condition. There will be sufficient of the whole man to constitute identity. And the distinction of a resurrection, and a new creation, will be sacredly preserved.

THESE remarks, I thought it necessary to make, before I proceeded to the inquiry in the text. We must know what a doctrine is, before we can determine, with respect to its credibility. And as to that of the resurrection, before we advance one step, the terms should be well defined. It has been the fate of this doctrine to be misrepresented, both by friends and foes. Some of the former have exposed it to contempt, by describing the confusion of the great day, when every scattered limb, and even particle of dust, should rush into its place. And the latter have inquired, with an air of triumph, how an exact distribution can be made, when different spirits may possibly lay claim to the same body ? In consequence of the various revolutions, to which matter is liable, they maintain, that the same particles may enter into the substance of more than one human frame.—Whose, then, shall they be, at the great day ? But to these queries, no Christian is obliged to furnish an answer. They proceed upon false principles, and wrong views of a resurrection. Consequently, that doctrine, as stated in the gospel, is not discredited by these objections.

THE point, and the only one before us, is, whether it be within the compass of divine power to recal the dead to life. It is certain, that we, who live, move, and have our being on this earth, shall return
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to the dust. Sooner or later, the sentence of death will be executed upon us. The question, therefore, is simply this, is the sentence of death irreverfible? Does it exceed the power of God to caufe thofe to live, who had been dead? Or would fuch an exertion of his almighty power, be inconfiftent with the perfections of his nature? To determine this point, was the fecond thing propofed in this difcourfe.

If it be incredible that God fhould raife the dead, it muft be on one or other of thefe accounts: either that a refurrection is in itfelf impoffible; or that it would be an unfuitable exertion of power on the part of the great God. Though the fupreme being is omnipotent, yet it is acknowledged, that he cannot work contradictions. And it is abfolutely certain, that infinite rectitude cannot do wrong. To one or the other of thefe fuppositions, we muft, therefore, be reduced, that God *can* not, or that he *ought* not, to raife the dead.

BUT who will undertake to fupport either of thefe pofitions? Who will prefume to fay, that God cannot redeem his creatures from the grave? If this be a truth, a deficiency of wifdom, or a deficiency of power, muft limit his operations. But it is demonftrable, that God is infinitely wife. Every poffible effect muft be an object of his contemplation. He muft know how to accomplifh every thing, of which his own infinite mind can form the idea. The means, therefore, by which thofe, who fleep in the grave, may be recovered to life and action, muft be obvious to God. We might as well deny his exiftence, as deny his acquaintance with all caufes and effects; and particularly, an effect fo conceivable as that of a refurrection.

As to man, the exertion of his powers is often impeded

peted by his ignorance. He may not know how to employ the abilities which God has given him. But such a suggestion would be the height of impiety, if referred to God. He, who had sufficient wisdom to form the human body, and to inspire it with life, must know how to revive it at a future day. The degree of wisdom, requisite to this end, cannot exceed that displayed in our creation. If God knew how to make man, he must know how to restore him. We cannot, then, argue the incredibility of a resurrection, from any deficiency of wisdom in the great agent. That God is infinitely wise, all nature cries aloud. Every world which rolls over our heads, the earth on which we dwell, and every thing which we behold, proclaim this truth. If, therefore, the whole fabrick of nature be a production of God, the wisdom, equal to such an effect, must be adequate to our resurrection.

AND the same arguments, which establish the infinite wisdom of our maker, must, likewise, establish his omnipotence. Power is an essential attribute of the Deity; and that power must extend to every thing, which does not imply a contradiction. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" are the words of God himself. And we may reply, that nothing can be too hard for him, which comes within the bounds of possibility. To say that it cannot work contradictions, is no reflection on omnipotence.

ON the power of God, we behold innumerable proofs, wherever we turn our eyes. The things, which are made, are an everlasting monument of it. Even our own persons are a demonstration, not only of the wisdom, but the power of their author. But is it conceivable, that God should be able to create, and not to restore? Is the resurrection of man a greater

greater work than his original production? Whilst we admit, that the power of God is equal to such astonishing effects as the creation, and preservation of the universe, can we hesitate to pronounce the recovery of man from a state of death within the compass of that power? If the resurrection be incredible, I think you must admit, that this does not arise from the want of ability, on the part of God, equal to the reanimation of the whole human kind.

We are reduced, then, to this supposition, that the resurrection of the dead is a vain expectation, because the author of our being could not consistently reverse the sentence of death. But which, of all the divine perfections, forbids such a display of wisdom and power? Would it contradict the veracity of God? By no means: for God has never declared that the dead shall rise no more. So far from it, he has encouraged us with the assurance, that death shall be swallowed up in victory. Would it impeach his justice? That cannot be pretended: for in no view whatever, can the rights claimed by man, be infringed by his resurrection. Would it be contrary to the mercy and goodness of God, contrary to that consistency of character, which an infinitely perfect being would naturally support? No: unless the creation of man be admitted as a like objection. If it accord with the divine perfections, that the human species should come into existence; that they should exist with various powers and capacities; and go through various changes previous to death; it cannot be a contradiction to those perfections, that they should revive hereafter, and experience new changes, according to their moral capacity for happiness. After viewing the subject on all sides, I must freely say, that I can discover nothing in the doctrine of a resurrection,

urrection, inconsistent with the character of God, or the measures of his government. It is as conceivable that God should restore life, as that he should make the original communication. In answer, then, to the inquiry in the text, I would reply, "it is not incredible that God should raise the dead."

BUT, in consequence of the christian revelation, we may proceed still farther : we may assert, that it is morally certain, that if a man die, he will live again. There are instances of an actual resurrection. The author of our religion restored a child to the arms of a parent ; and recalled a friend, who had been four days in the grave. And after he had suffered the pains of an infamous execution, he resumed the life, against which his enemies had conspired. These are facts, not handed down by tradition, but preserved by the faithful records of eye-witnesses. And our assent to them stands upon the same foundation with our assent to any article whatever, preserved by the historian. If any credit be due to testimony, it is due to that of the evangelists. They lived at the period, in which the extraordinary things, related by them, took place. Two of them were spectators ; and two received their accounts from those, who had conversed with our Saviour after his resurrection. Having, therefore, the best means of information, and having no conceivable interest in propagating a falsehood, it is nothing more than common justice to admit their credibility as witnesses. Upon grounds less stable than these, we assent to other historical facts. How, then, can we reject the resurrection either of Lazarus or Jesus, as an imposition on the credulity of mankind ?

DIFFICULTIES may be raised on every subject ; and objections may be made to every fact, of which we
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were not eye-witnesses. The great revolutions, which have taken place on this earth, may be plausibly opposed : and at our distance from the scene of confusion and bloodshed, we may urge many specious objections against the political events, and violences, which have grown out of the present struggle for freedom. Still, however, one competent witness outweighs all such objections : and many competent witnesses bear united testimony to these facts, that Christ raised others, and finally rose himself. Unless, therefore, we mean to reject all evidence, but that of our own senses, I see not how we can withhold our assent from the doctrine of an actual resurrection.

BUT if Christ be risen, then we can have no doubt that we shall live also : his resurrection establishes the authority of the gospel. And it is a leading doctrine of his gospel, that all, who are in their graves, will hear his voice, and come forth. In various places, this most interesting truth is proclaimed to mankind. But in the epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul has exerted all his eloquence, and all his powers of argument, to set it in such a light as should satisfy the human mind, and influence our actions. For these reasons, the sacred volume is said to have brought life and immortality to light. Not that mankind, previous to the gospel, had no idea of a future existence ; not that the Jews were wholly ignorant of a resurrection : neither of these can be admitted as facts. The pharisees, it is certain, maintained this doctrine in opposition to the sadducees. And in the writings of the Heathen, we meet with many flowery descriptions of the future residence, and exquisite delights of good men. But if life and immortality did not originate with the gospel, they received great light from that source. The only rational

tional and consistent account of them, is to be found in the christian oracles. There only is the doctrine explicitly revealed. And the resurrection of our blessed Saviour being circumstantially described in the gospel, and uniformly represented as an earnest of our own, it may be admitted, that the discovery of life and immortality was reserved to signalize that dispensation.

WITH what sentiments of gratitude, ought we, therefore, to regard the blessed God, through whose tender mercy the day-spring from on high hath visited us? What an unspeakable privilege to have our doubts and fears removed, and our conjectures turned into certainty? To us, it is not incredible that God should raise the dead. We are assured, that he has power to accomplish our resurrection; and wisdom to direct that power. We know that he has already shown wonders in the grave. And we have the satisfaction to reflect, that because the Saviour lives, we shall live also. Let us, then, be unfeignedly thankful, that our existence is not bounded by this transitory state. Let us bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who, of his abundant mercy, hath begotten us to this lively hope. And among the highest enjoyments, of which our present condition is capable, let us rank the delightful expectation of "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away."

KNOWING that our Redeemer liveth, and that his resurrection is an earnest of ours, let us habituate ourselves to consider this state as but an introduction to a better. If we had nothing to hope beyond the grave, we might reasonably set our affections on things below. Upon this supposition, we might say with the followers of Epicurus, "let us eat and drink,

drink, for to-morrow we die." Or, with the infidel in the book of Ecclesiastes, we might declaim, "all is vanity: that which befalleth the sons of men, befall-eth the beasts, even one thing befall-eth them. As the one dieth, so dieth the other: yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence above a beast. All go into one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." But, blessed be God, a better hope is inspired by the gospel. In the view of a Christian, death is not destruction. He considers it merely as a change; and a change to the infinite advantage of those, who have so numbered their days, as to apply their hearts unto wisdom. With this persuasion, he can rejoice as though he rejoiced not; weep as though he wept not; buy as though he possessed not; and use this world as not abusing it.

FINALLY—Let the assurance of a resurrection excite us to prepare for it, by a diligent application of our best powers to the duties of Christianity; and by a constant endeavour to live soberly and piously in the world. We read of a resurrection, both of the just and of the unjust. And both reason and the gospel assure us, that our temper and behaviour, in this state of moral discipline, must determine our condition, when recalled from the grave. If we have performed the christian duties, have cherished the christian faith, and displayed the christian character, our resurrection will be glorious and happy. Over us, the second death will have no power. Like the angels of God, we shall die no more; but mortality will be swallowed up of life! Let this conviction raise us above the low pursuits of time and sense, and excite us to have our conversation in heaven. Let it enforce the laws of our blessed master; and give weight to every admonition and reproof contained

tained in the gospel. And let it henceforth be our resolution, to suffer no earthly concern to interfere with our virtuous exertions, or to retard our progress towards the heavenly world. Thus faithful unto death, we shall awake and sing with those who now sleep in the dust; and our piety will be rewarded with a glorious resurrection.

Sermon XXIV.

On Sincerity.

PHILIPPIANS I. 10.

“THAT YE MAY BE SINCERE, AND WITHOUT OFFENCE, TILL THE DAY OF CHRIST.”

IF we examine the spirit and laws of the gospel, we shall find, that too much stress cannot be laid on simplicity and sincerity; and that too much care cannot be taken to cultivate these virtues. It was the recommendation of Nathaniel, that “he was an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.” This short, but comprehensive eulogy, was pronounced by the lips of our blessed Saviour. We may, therefore, conclude, that sincerity is a virtue, which he held in high estimation: and we shall be confirmed in this idea, if we advert to his pure example.

BUT, as the inspired followers of our divine Lord taught his doctrines, so they inculcated his moral lessons. Truth and righteousness, simplicity and sincerity, were set forth, in all their charms, by the apostles.

apostles. St. Paul, in particular, thought it an indispensable duty to recommend these virtues to the christian converts. Accordingly, writing to the Philippians, he admonishes them to be sincere, and without offence. And to enforce his admonition, he reminds them of the day of Christ, when all hearts would be laid open, and every motive of human conduct would be exposed.

IN the following discourse, it is my design to consider *sincerity* in the most extensive sense of the word, and to say what may be necessary to its recommendation.

SINCERITY may be considered in two points of view, as it respects our maker, and our fellow-men. Let us examine it in each of these relations. First, as it relates to God, sincerity implies, that we feel the reverence, the love, the gratitude, the contrition, the fervent devotion, and earnest desire to honour and please him, which we solemnly profess. The heart and tongue of the hypocrite are always at variance: but the man of sincerity does not speak one thing, and mean another. If he professes to believe in the being, providence, and righteous government of a God, he really entertains a firm persuasion of these important truths. If he professes to fear God, the principle itself has an existence in his heart. If he professes to love him, his love is without dissimulation. When he acknowledges the divine favours, he is actuated by a lively gratitude to the author of all good. And he is truly humbled and penitent, when he confesses his sins. When he asks forgiveness, it is his earnest desire to be forgiven. And when he promises amendment, his heart confirms what his lips proclaim. Every outward expression of piety is the genuine offspring of a heart right with God.

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THE hypocrite, from motives of policy, or interest, assumes a serious countenance ; but the man of sincerity feels serious. The one prays to be seen of men, the other to be heard of God. The one observes the public institutions of religion from a regard to appearances ; the other from a regard to the great object of worship, and a conviction of duty. In all things of a serious concern, the hypocrite is governed by what he esteems politic ; the man of sincerity by that, which he knows to be right.

BUT that you may have an adequate idea of this virtue, as it more immediately respects the divine being, I would ask your attention to the following particulars. First, that piety is sincere, which disposes men to be as attentive to the private duties of religion, as to those of a public nature. He, who is devout, where there is no witness but God, cannot be actuated by any unworthy motives. In the house of God, there may be the form without the spirit of devotion. But, in his place of retirement, it is inconceivable that any man should pray, without feeling devout ; that he should give thanks without gratitude ; confess without contrition ; or promise obedience, without an intention to perform. Before him only, who seeth in secret, there could be no inducement to engage in these religious offices, but a conviction of their propriety. When, therefore, men are as fervent in their private as public devotions ; when they treat God with the same respect in their closet, as in his courts, we have reason to think that their piety is not a pretence.

IN forming a judgment of human characters, it is highly proper to inquire, how a man would conduct in some particular instance, when he supposed there was no eye upon him but that of his maker. Could you

you doubt of his charity, if you found that he was as bountiful to the poor in secret as in public? If he performed his promises, when there was no law to compel him, or no human witness of his engagements, should you question his integrity? Or could you entertain a suspicion of his gratitude, when he more than repaid a benefactor; but, at the same time, did it in such a private manner, that there could be no expectation, on his part, that the deed would ever come to light? Most certainly, alms so bestowed, promises so performed, and such returns for favours received, would be interpreted as an incontestable proof of sincerity.

BUT the same reasoning will apply in the case before us. If he, who gives secretly, may be supposed to give sincerely, he, who prays to God in secret, may be supposed to pray from right motives. His solemn addresses, his humble confessions, his grateful acknowledgments, must all proceed from a state of mind, that would bear to be exposed. To judge of your own sincerity, you have, therefore, seriously to examine, whether you are as religious in secret, as in the view of the world. Perhaps, your fellow-men have no reason to charge you with delinquency; have you no reason to accuse yourselves? This is a point, which you must ascertain by a rigid scrutiny of your private life. You must inquire what takes place, when the world is shut out, and you are conscious of no presence but that of your maker. And if your homage be equally respectful at all times, and in all places, you may rely, that it is the homage of the heart. So far as piety is concerned, if you are the same person in the world, and retired from it, you will give no just ground of suspicion to others, nor can you reasonably suspect yourselves.

A CHEERFUL

A CHEERFUL obedience to the laws of God is a second proof of religious sincerity. If we love God, we shall certainly keep his commandments. It is impossible to reconcile a wicked life with a reverence of the divine character, or a grateful sense of the divine favours. Where there is an ardent affection for the supreme being, there will be a constant endeavour to do those things, which are pleasing in his sight. Obedience to earthly parents is one fruit of filial piety. And why should not obedience to God flow from a principle of love to him?

BUT, if from the certainty of fear, gratitude, and love to God, we should infer the certainty of obedience, most assuredly, from a course of obedience, we may infer the existence of those principles. The argument, in this view, is as conclusive as in the other. A cheerful submission to the authority of God, must be the consequence of right affections towards him. If the fruit be good, the tree must be good. You may, therefore, take it for granted, that there is no hypocrisy, where there appears to be a steady aim to verify religious professions by a cheerful obedience. A cold, and reluctant submission to the will of God, may be easily distinguished from that, which comes from the heart. And every man may determine, to his own satisfaction, whether his duty is a burden to him, or his delight.

FINALLY—Our piety must be sincere, if we have a respect to all the commandments. Submission, in particular instances, is no proof that God is the object of our reverence, gratitude, or love. There are some laws, which we may feel no inclination to transgress. Our constitution may be such, that, in certain cases, we should prefer obedience, even were the penalty of the law suspended. Every man knows, that

that there are sins, which easily beset him. And we are equally sensible, that temptations, which are formidable to some, are very harmless to others. Obedience, therefore, must be uniform and universal ; it must extend to all the laws of God, and every branch of duty, in order to be a test of religious sincerity. The habitual transgression of one point would prove, that we observed none other from right motives.

THUS have I considered sincerity, as it respects the blessed God. As his children and subjects, love, reverence, gratitude, fear, and devout homage, are a tribute, which we cannot refuse. As Christians, we profess to render him this tribute. If, therefore, we behave with like circumspection at all times, and in all places ; if we obey willingly ; if we obey uniformly ; our religion is a reality, and not a hypocritical pretence. Such proofs are incontestable. They amount to a demonstration, that our piety is a confirmed habit, and that our praise is not of men, but of God.

BUT, secondly—Sincerity, as it respects our fellow-men, deserves our particular consideration.—And, in this relation, it implies, that we really are what we would seem to be : that we reverence the truth ; that as we think, so we speak ; that as we profess, so we feel ; that as we promise, so it is our sacred intention to perform. Opposed to this virtue, are the various artifices practised in the world. We see men continually holding out false appearances ; sacrificing truth to interest ; prostituting the name of friendship to worldly purposes ; preferring low art to true wisdom ; and studying, by every disguise, to hide their real character. But however these arts may be commended by those who practise

tise them, they receive no countenance from the gospel. He, who forms himself on that system, will be one, in whom there is no guile. He will be an honest man, in the largest, and most emphatical sense, in which the terms can be used.

To prevent, however, all mistakes, I would observe, that prudence is not incompatible with sincerity. In order to be honest, it is not necessary that we should proclaim all our thoughts, or make every inquisitive person the repository of our sentiments. Sincerity does not oblige us to expose all the faults, which we detect in others. Nor are we, by any means, under an obligation to acquaint every man, whom we meet, with the ideas, which we have formed of his abilities, or moral character. It is sufficient, that we never declare, either by word or action, any thing contrary to the sentiment of our hearts. But to pour out every thing, which comes into our minds, is not sincerity, but folly. It is often the source of great mischiefs. And it is always a transgression of that sacred rule, "to be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

—THE man of sincerity is he, who, when occasion calls, and duty requires, will invariably speak his mind. It is he, who, in the line of business, takes no advantage of the ignorance and credulity of others, and never abuses the confidence reposed in him. It is he, who never commends his own, when he knows that no commendation is due: and never depreciates the things of others, when his conscience would give him the lie. It is he, who, when he contracts, means to fulfil; and when he promises, has no other intention but to perform. It is he, who is a stranger to the arts of flattery, and who would disdain to speak a language foreign from his heart,

heart, in order to ingratiate himself with any man. It is he, who is very sparing of his professions of friendship; but where he does make them, never fails to support the character. In short, it is he, who, if a minister of religion, preaches nothing but that which he believes; if a ruler, is actuated by that love of his country, which he professes; if a magistrate, entertains that reverence of justice, and solicitude for the good order of society, which ought to guide his decisions; and, if a private person, acts, in every instance, conformably to the sentiments, which he expresses. He, who really is in temper, in opinion, in habit, the person he would choose to be esteemed by the world, *he* is the man of sincerity.

It happens, that the virtues, which are of most importance, need the least to be said, by way of explanation. This is certainly the case with respect to sincerity. Every man knows, when he acts a sincere part. And he is not at a loss to determine, as he is not backward to resent, when he is insincerely treated by others. I shall not, therefore, multiply cases, to which the admonition in the text may be referred. But I shall proceed to the recommendation of sincerity, by such arguments as shall be most applicable to the subject.

AND, first—The vanity of all disguises is an unanswerable objection against them. To what end is insincerity with respect to God? Surely, no one can be so unacquainted with his character, as to imagine that he can impose on him. “Hell is naked before him, and destruction has no covering;” how much less the heart of man! God is perfectly acquainted with every transaction within our bosoms. He understands our thoughts afar off: and every secret spring of human action is exposed to his view.—

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Consequently,

Consequently, the attempt to impose on him must be as vain, as it is impious.

BUT the arts of deception are often vainly practised upon man. How frequently does it happen, that the insincere impose on none but themselves? Men, who suppose their views and motives a secret to the world; who, without faith, profess to believe, and, without morals, pretend to religion; who fawn and flatter, when, they imagine, it will serve their interest; who are friends without affection, and, by turns, all things to all persons; such men are generally seen through, and receive not the reward, which they wish, but that which they deserve.—There is so much penetration in some, and common sense in all, that the insincere cannot escape. Their artifices are detected and despised. And a general odium pursues the hypocrite, under whatever form he may appear.

IN the nature of things, it is impossible, for a long time, to disguise our true character. If we are hypocrites in religion, and pretenders in friendship, our insincerity will come to light. If our tongues and hearts are at variance, we shall, in some unguarded moment, betray our dishonesty. And when once known to be destitute of principle, our influence with the discerning will be at an end. We may be treated with outward civility, but we shall be loaded with just contempt. The inefficacy of art and falsehood, and the disgrace attending them, furnish, therefore, a most powerful argument in favour of sincerity.

BUT, secondly—It should be remembered, that there are moments of sober reflection, and that, in those moments, the insincere will reproach and despise themselves for their duplicity. We do not proclaim

claim to the world all the disagreeable sensations, which we feel. Least of all, do the artful expose to others the self-condemning hours, which imbitter their lives. But we may be assured, that men, who are destitute of honesty and sincerity, who have made shipwreck of honour and a good conscience; and who have preferred the maxims of worldly wisdom, to the laws of that wisdom which is from above, have, at certain seasons, an earnest of their future punishment. Their hearts know their own bitterness. In the hour of sickness, and on the pillow of death, they sometimes have an opportunity to reflect. And what their reflections must be, it is more easy to conceive than describe.

LASTLY—The hour is coming, when all hearts will be laid open; when the true character of every man will stand revealed, and when a just punishment will overtake the hypocrite. He, who once came to teach men truth and righteousness, will assuredly appear to reprove the violation of their eternal laws. In the text, we read of the day of Christ; and we are exhorted to be sincere and inoffensive till that day. And if there is nothing secret, which will not then be revealed; if all our equivocations and mental reservations; all our disguises and falsehoods; all our vain professions, whether of piety or friendship; all our low arts and dishonourable motives; if not only our actions, but their principle, will then be exposed, nothing more need be said in favour of sincerity. Under the conviction, that the mask would be torn from you, and that every meanness, every artifice, would be proclaimed in the ears of millions, could you act the hypocrite? Could you, with such a prospect before your eyes, disregard the exhortations to sincerity, which are addressed to you in the gospel?

PRESUMING

PRESUMING that you have just ideas, both of the danger and infamy of falsehood, I would earnestly recommend the line of conduct prescribed by the apostle. Be sincere, and, if possible, without offence, till the day of Christ. In the concerns of religion, avoid every appearance of duplicity. Be sure, that your hearts are right with God, when you solemnly approach him; that you feel that love, gratitude, and respect, that desire to please, and fear to offend him, which you openly profess. In your transactions with mankind, let sincerity and uprightness preserve you. Learn to despise every false and evil way; and be persuaded, that he only, who walketh uprightly, walketh surely. When the language of the lips corresponds with the sentiments of the heart, a man has nothing to fear. But the deceiver is always in danger of detection,

LET this, therefore, be your rejoicing, even the testimony of conscience, that in simplicity and sincerity, you have had your conversation in the world. Pay a proper regard to the rules of prudence; but by no means neglect those of honour and truth. To be sincere, is to be amiable in the highest degree. To want it, is to be destitute of that, which may be considered as the basis of every virtue. Wherefore, in your whole intercourse with God and man, be direct and consistent. You will be able to look into your own hearts without disgust. You will be able to meet the eye of your fellow-men; and you will not dread the discoveries of a future day. Your hearts will not reproach you as long as you live. And you will not be dismayed at appearing before him, who is greater than your hearts, and who knoweth all things. The words of the psalmist are so applicable, that with them I shall conclude my discourse.—

“ Lord,

"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that doeth these things, shall never be moved."

Sermon XXV.

On Contentment.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 11.

"I HAVE LEARNED, IN WHATSOEVER STATE I AM, THEREWITH TO BE CONTENT."

THESE are the words of the apostle Paul; and as we have reason to think he spake the real sentiments of his heart, they give us the most exalted idea of his character. For a person, who enjoys all the comforts, conveniencies and elegances of life; who is surrounded with friends, courted by the rich, and venerated by the poor; for such a person to appear contented with his external situation, is nothing more than we have a right to expect. He has every thing a reasonable being could desire, and ought, therefore, not only to profess, but really to feel satisfied with his condition. But, to our astonishment, we hear this triumphant language from a distressed follower of the humble Galilean; and we behold this virtue, in all its perfection, in one, who, like the master he served, had not where to lay his head. Yes, my hearers, it was a poor, despised, and persecuted

persecuted disciple of the blessed Jesus, who assures us, *he had learned in every state to be content.* Glorious apostle, may we learn that great lesson, in which thou wast so well instructed! May we know how to abound, and how to want. In prosperity, may we rejoice; in adversity, be content. In every situation of life, may we be able to adopt thy language; and may it be dictated by the same greatness of mind, and well-grounded hope of a better existence.

THE occasion of these words, which do so much honour to the apostle, and inculcate such an excellent temper upon us, was a discovery he made in his Philippian brethren. Upon their first conversion to Christianity, they manifested a beneficent disposition towards the poorer saints; and, according to their several ability, they contributed to their relief. But for some time their charitable contributions were suspended. This led the apostle to suspect, they had lost that tender concern, which they once manifested towards him, and their suffering brethren. To his great joy, however, he soon found that his suspicions were utterly groundless. "I rejoiced greatly (says he, in the verse preceding the text) that now, at the last, your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want; for *I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.* I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Every where, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer need." This is the language of a philosopher; it is more, it is the language of a Christian. And until we can adopt it in sincerity, and possess something of that spirit, by which it was dictated, in vain do we pretend to be the children of God, or
disciples

disciples of his Son. Contentment is a virtue no less grateful to heaven, than beneficial to ourselves. It is, indeed, absolutely necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of this life ; and without it, we are certainly unqualified for a superior state of felicity.— This virtue constitutes a temporal heaven. Like the sun, it gilds every object : it dispels every cloud from the mind. It is the parent of delight in this world ; and in the world to come, it will be highly approved, and liberally rewarded by him, who orders the various circumstances of our lives, who makes us to abound, or to suffer need ; who places us in a cottage, or on a throne !

FROM a conviction, therefore, of its absolute importance, both with respect to our present and future enjoyments, I shall make the great duty of CONTENTMENT the subject of this discourse. And,

FIRST—I shall endeavour to explain the virtue itself.

AND, secondly—Shew how it may be attained.

FIRST—The apostle asserts, that in every state, whether prosperous or adverse, he had learned to be content. What was the particular state of his mind ? What his feelings ? And how did they operate ? To understand this, we have only to consider, what passes within ourselves, on particular occasions ; and how we are affected, when we profess, and feel satisfied with any occurrence, or event, in which we are immediately concerned. It is impossible, but, at some period of our lives, we have experienced this affection. What, therefore, other men are sensible of, at certain moments, was the constant tenour of his soul. He ever brought down his mind to his situation. And notwithstanding his lot in this world

was

was uncommonly severe, yet he was not miserable, because he was content that God should rule ; was convinced of the wisdom and equity of all the divine administrations ; and was morally sure, that all things would work together for good to them, who cultivated this pious resignation.

LIKE him, then, we should endeavour to believe our condition in life wisely and mercifully ordered ; and that no change could have taken place, in the divine plan, without defeating some glorious object, or producing some greater inconvenience. A right judgment of things is certainly included in true christian content. God looks to the heart : and he expects that we should *think*, as well as speak respectfully of his dispensations. Our pride sometimes, and at others, decency hinder us from complaining.— And, it is possible, a sense of duty may extort from us a cool commendation of the divine conduct, so far as it respects our lot in the world. But this does not come up to the temper displayed by the holy apostle. Nor is profession only, the more essential part of this virtue. True content includes in it, the most worthy and honourable conceptions of the supreme being ; a firm persuasion that he has treated us as a kind parent ; and that our circumstances in life are such as we should wish, were we able to comprehend his vast designs. Upon this basis, the virtue now under consideration must stand : and it must grow out of these sentiments. Otherwise, like the house built on the sand, it will be overturned by the first unruly blast : and absolutely crushed by the weight of unexpected calamity.

I MENTION this, because, whatever we may pretend, we do not appear to realize this truth, that God is equally wise, just, and benign, when we are abased,

abased, as when we abound ; when we suffer need, as when we are filled. The sun-shine of prosperity, indeed, raises our spirits ; and we are ready to believe the world is wisely governed, while all our undertakings are crowned with success. But when tribulation cometh, we are secretly offended. The administrations of providence then want those marks of wisdom, which we expected to find. And we are ready to ask our impatient hearts, has the judge of all the earth done right ? Against all such vain and impious conceits, we must guard with the utmost attention. And however we are disposed of in the world, we must possess ourselves of a firm persuasion, that all the paths of God are mercy and truth ; and nothing has happened to us unworthy the permission or appointment of the best of beings.

BUT, secondly—True content includes in it, not only just sentiments of the blessed God, and the dispensations of his providence towards us, but, also, affections of the heart correspondent with such ideas. The apostle, as he was persuaded in his mind, that his condition was wisely ordered, so he acted agreeably to that persuasion. He resigned his will to the will of heaven. He submitted to trials, of the most distressing kind, with undaunted resolution. Like his divine master, he was ever ready to say, “not my will, but thine be done.” Though bonds and imprisonment awaited him, yet these calamities, as they did not alter his sentiments respecting the divine conduct, neither did they destroy the tranquillity, or overcome the steadiness of his mind. He was calm amid sufferings overwhelming to humanity. When persecuted on every side, he was not cast down. When troubled, he was not in despair. He was not weary of his condition, nor did he esteem

life a burden, merely because his lot had been so adverse. With a serene and cheerful disposition, he opposed himself to poverty, contempt, and persecution, knowing whence these evils came, and convinced of the gracious end, and salutary design of them.

INSTRUCTED, therefore, by the example of this holy apostle, we must not only believe that God hath done all things well, but the state of our minds must be such, as naturally arises from this belief. The assent of our understandings must influence the heart. How adverse soever, we must bow our minds to our condition. And to whatever sufferings we are appointed, in the providence of God, we must be able to say with David, "behold, here I am, let him do to me as seemeth him good!" When the king of Israel addressed the Almighty in this language, he entertained no hard thoughts, nor indulged any secret indignation against the supreme disposer of all events. He felt satisfied with his administrations. Adversity did not so ruffle his mind, as to prevent the exercise of his reason.

AND thus patient, serene, and even cheerful, should we be, when we are disappointed in our expectations; and events take place, not only different from our wishes, but directly contrary to them. We must guard against all rebellious insurrections; we must say to the storms of passion, too ready, alas! to rise upon every occasion, *peace, be still*. And we must see, that our commands be carried into execution. A contented mind will indulge no secret swelling against providence. It will take cheerfully the spoiling of all earthly goods: and will account it all joy, when beset with divers tribulations. This may seem like a paradox to those, who have consulted their ease and

and convenience through life, and never attempted to bear misfortune with the spirit of Christians. But the true philosopher, and sincere disciple of Jesus Christ, will rejoice in every situation : and being prepared for the worst, he will not be surpris'd into a sentiment or a feeling, which shall reflect dishonour upon the divine government.

BUT, thirdly—True content includes, not only a firm persuasion, that all things are for the best, and a temper of mind conformable to this persuasion, but also a course of external behaviour correspondent with our sentiments and affections. A man, who is possessed of this virtue, will express the highest satisfaction in the providential government of God.—Whatever befalls him, he will not impiously reflect on the supreme disposer of all events. If hungry, he will not fret, and curse his king and God, like the impious transgressors mentioned by the prophet : nor, like those mentioned in the Revelation, will he blaspheme the majesty of heaven, because of his pains and sufferings. In such profane and impious language, will wicked men sometimes vent their indignation against the blessed God. They will boldly question his wisdom or power : or, with frontless impudence, will charge him with injustice.

NOR so the true christian philosopher. He will uniformly bear testimony to the wisdom and equity of the divine administrations. If in adversity, he will say with David, "I know, O Lord, thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." He will take no unlawful measures to remedy his situation. But with courage, alacrity, and zeal, will he discharge the duties, and pursue the business of life. And, conscious that he suffers according to the will of God, he will commit the
keeping

keeping of his soul to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator. Such, my hearers, was the glorious attainment of the apostle; such the exalted virtue recommended by his example.

HAVING thus explained what is included in true christian content, I proceed, secondly, to inquire how it may be attained. And that a contented mind does, in some measure, depend upon our own exertions, is plain from the text. "*I have LEARNED* (says the apostle) *in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*" This virtue was not innate; nor did it arise spontaneously in the soul. It was the result of severe discipline on *his* part, and divine grace on that of his maker.

In the first place, we may reasonably suppose, the apostle bore in mind this undoubted truth, that God had a right to order the condition of his creatures according to his sovereign pleasure. This was one step towards the attainment of that virtue, which was so eminently displayed in the temper, language, and behaviour of this good man. And the like reflection will lead us to be contented with *our* lot, how adverse soever, and contrary to our expectations. "Even though the fig-tree should not blossom, and there should be no fruit in the vine," it will dispose us to "rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation." The God, in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways, may certainly order the circumstances of our lives according to his own wise pleasure. He may set us with princes, or level us with the meanest of our species: he may clothe us with fine linen, or cover us with rags: he may fill our mouths with good things, or send us empty away. He has an undoubted right to do as he pleases with us; and, without great impiety, we cannot

cannot quarrel with his dispensations, or say unto him, what doest thou?

CONSIDERING, then, who we are, and from whom we derive our existence; considering who upholds us in being, and bestows upon us all those things, which we fondly and presumptuously call our own; shall we be impatient, unresigned, or dissatisfied with our condition? Shall we entertain a murmuring thought, or utter one indecent expression, relative to the majesty of heaven? By no means. *Shall I not do what I will with my own?* is a maxim, which ought to awe us into submission. And in the mouth of God it is an argument, that we ought to be content, let what will come to pass.

LET us, therefore, realize this truth, that we owe our being, our powers, all our present enjoyments, and all we expect, to the great disposer of human events. Let us remember his right over the workmanship of his hands. To these considerations, let us join his wisdom, power, and goodness, and we shall have an unfailing motive to rest satisfied with our lot. A frequent meditation on these things, will teach us true content. If we are not uncommonly stupid, we shall learn that great lesson, which the apostle studied with success. We shall acquire a virtue most ornamental to human nature, and essential to human happiness.

BUT, secondly—To learn contentment, we should remember, not only that our lot in this world is ordered by a wise and merciful being, but that we are utterly unworthy of the very least of his favours. This was a reflection, which, I doubt not, often occurred to the apostle's mind, and was a powerful means of rendering him satisfied with his condition. He recollected, that he had no claim upon the divine bounty ;

bounty ; that God was under no obligation to gratify every wish and desire of his soul. What though persecution brandished its flaming sword, and calamities of various kinds awaited him, he could not say, God was in justice bound to avert these evils. He, therefore, reasoned himself into that pious state of mind, which has been already described. With his deserts he contrasted his sufferings, and was content to receive the cup, which providence had poured out to him.

LET the same truth teach us the same lesson. We are certainly great offenders against the just and merciful governor of the world. Long since have we forfeited our lives, and every enjoyment : wherefore, of all his creatures, it would ill become us to complain of our condition ; or to resent the troubles we meet with, in the ordinary course of providence. It is granted, our longing desires are not gratified in the present state. We will even grant that man is born to trouble : still, if we suffer less than our iniquities deserve, we ought humbly to acquiesce in every dispensation. It is unreasonable, and highly criminal, to be discontented, when the divine mercy evidently triumphs over justice.

THIRDLY—To acquire this virtue, we should often turn our views towards the heavenly world, and habituate ourselves to contemplate those future good things, which God hath prepared for them who love him. The gospel discovers to us a state of pure, and uninterrupted, and eternal felicity. It promises joys, which never fade, and pleasures, “which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which hath not entered into the human heart to conceive.” With the expected happiness of the celestial world, the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared.

They

They are less than nothing, when contrasted with an eternal and exceeding weight of glory!

WHEREFORE, in the hour of tribulation, let it be our support, that we are designed for a better, and a nobler state. If we are reduced to poverty, let us consider the blessedness of those, who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom. If we are afflicted and tormented, let us remember that our afflictions will end with this life; and in the life to come, that all tears will be wiped from our eyes, and sorrow and sighing be forever done away. We cannot be habitually discontented, if we realize these truths. No loss, no disgrace, no disappointment, can prey upon our spirits, if we have our conversation in heaven, and feel as citizens of that blessed place. This, joined to the considerations already mentioned, supported the apostle Paul amid his cruel sufferings. "For this cause (saith he) we faint not; while we look not at the things which are seen, but those which are unseen. For the things which are seen, are temporal; but those which are unseen, are eternal."

FOURTHLY—It would greatly assist us in the acquisition of true content, to contemplate their example, who have been most celebrated for this virtue. The apostle Paul, as we have already observed, was a glorious instance of christian resignation. He had long subjected his will to the will of God. In every state, he had learned to be content. Let us, therefore, often revolve in our minds, the various sufferings, hardships, and dangers, he was called to encounter. Let us consider how he behaved in the most trying situations. The contemplation of such a glorious example will both instruct and entertain. It will happily conduce to form this amiable temper in us. With a realizing sense of the divine government,

ment, of our own ill deserts, and of the future joys, which we expect, it will conspire to render us wise, contented, and happy.

BUT, above all, permit me to recommend the still more glorious example of Jesus Christ. In every period of his life and ministry, he displayed this virtue in perfection. He was contented in heaven, before the world was. He was contented with his humble lot, when he divested himself of his native glory, and appeared in our form. He was content, though a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; though despised, rejected, and treated with every mark of contempt. He was content, though he had not where to lay his head. Even when led forth as a lamb to the slaughter, and numbered with transgressors, he discovered no signs of resentment, irrefignation, or discontent. Let us, therefore, if we pretend to be his disciples, walk as he walked. He left us an example, that we should follow his steps. By cultivating his virtues, and imitating his amiable behaviour, we shall at once adorn our characters, and become qualified for those superiour enjoyments, which he hath purchased for us.

FINALLY—We should often repair to the throne of grace, and intreat that being, who knows our frailty, to support us in the hour of tribulation, and inspire us with such ideas of his providential government, as shall render us contented and happy in every situation. This is no more than a reasonable service. It is but a decent token of respect for him, who orders our condition in this life, and who knows the assistance we need. To him, therefore, let us often repair; and should he, in mercy, grant our request; should he enable us to acquire that habit, which is recommended in the text, it would be a
source

source of rational pleasure in this world, and a suitable preparative for the world to come. A contented mind, how great, how desirable a blessing! May you, my brethren, possess this happy temper. May you learn this great lesson. In prosperity, may you be joyful; in adversity, may you be content. May you be instructed, both how to abound, and how to suffer want. May none of the evils of life disturb your minds. In whatsoever state, may you shew yourselves men: may you do more, may you act up to the dignity of your character as Christians. Then will you enjoy the utmost this world can afford; and, at the same time, secure to yourselves more noble and lasting pleasures.

Sermon XXVI.

On governing the Temper.

PROVERBS XXV. 28.

“HE THAT HATH NO RULE OVER HIS OWN SPIRIT, IS LIKE A CITY THAT IS BROKEN DOWN, AND WITHOUT WALLS.”

NEVER does man appear to greater disadvantage, than when he is the sport of his own ungoverned passions. Never has he more reason to be dissatisfied with himself, than when the tempest of his soul begins to subside, and conscience first reproaches him for his outrageous folly. The amazement,

ment, the mortification of such a person, are so beautifully described by the poet, that, though unusual to introduce poetry into a religious discourse, I cannot resist the temptation on this occasion.

“ Our passions gone, and reason on her throne,

“ Amaz’d we see the mischiefs we have done :

“ So when the storm is o’er, and winds are laid,

“ The calm sea wonders at the wrecks it made.”

COULD a man, in the height of passion, see himself, he would want no other motive to govern his temper. Could he always anticipate his own disagreeable feelings, he would take seasonable care to prevent them. But the misfortune of the passionate man is, that he acts first, and then reflects ; in which case, reflection serves only to augment his misery.

In the due government of human passions, consists the dignity of human nature. And upon this depends our happiness. Man is a compound being. He has passions to urge ; and reason to direct. Each serves an important purpose in the system. And were either wanting, he would become utterly unfit for the rank assigned by his wise creator. With less reason, he would be a brute ; with a higher degree of it, more than man. His great object, therefore, should be, not to extinguish, but to govern his passions. He that does this, is a wise man : but “ *he that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*” He lies exposed to every vice. The enemy may enter at pleasure, and make the most fatal depredations.

By comparing the language of the text with other expressions of the wise man, we can have no doubt, that he had a particular view to the passion of *anger*. He that *ruleth his spirit*, and *he that is slow to anger*,
are

are synonymous terms. And the idea he would convey is this, that a man, who had no command over his natural temper, who was easily inflamed, and violent in his resentments, that such an unhappy person would lay himself open to every species of vice, and continually make work for repentance.—What he had done in passion, he would have to undo in a serious moment. What he had said in his haste, he would have to retract. And thus would he destroy all rational enjoyment, by successive acts of folly, and new mortification. The wise man compares him to a city without walls; and which had nothing to defend it from the incursions of an enemy. A happy similitude! Such, indeed, is the angry man. His ungoverned spirit throws down every bulwark, which reason had erected for the security of his innocence. It invites every insidious foe to enter, and lay waste. And it seldom happens, that they do not take advantage of his insecurity. In plain words, a man, who has no command over his temper, is always off his guard; in a fit of passion, he may do that, which it is impossible he should repair; and one act of violence may lead on to the most shocking enormities. This I take to be the sentiment particularly conveyed in the text.

BUT in prosecution of the discourse, I shall consider the words of the wise man in their more extensive signification. Man has other passions besides that of anger. And the word spirit is equally applicable to them. What I shall, therefore, attempt is, to show the necessity of governing our peculiar temper, as we would avoid the evil consequences mentioned in the text; and which, from experience and observation, we know to be the immediate punishment of unrestrained passion.

And

AND, first—I would observe, the *spirit* or *temper* evidently varies in different persons. There is a diversity in all the works of God. But in man, this is most apparent. Though all possess the same essential faculties, yet, amongst the human kind, there is an endless diversity of character. This is not the sole effect of culture, or early education; it takes rise from the original constitution. Men are made differently in many respects. As they come from the creating hand of God, they are unlike each other. In the predominance of one passion, or the general tone of the whole, they as evidently differ, as in the particular features and cast of each countenance.—This will be acknowledged by all, who have studied human nature. Why there should be this diversity, is a question, which none can answer, but the author of our being. But the fact itself is indisputable. In the world, we see men good and bad, whose character is evidently the result of natural constitution. Some are, by nature, meek and lowly of heart. When they receive an injury, they are disposed candidly to overlook it. They are not insensible of the wrong; but they cannot work themselves up to such a pitch of resentment, as, with their own hand, to punish the aggressor, or to involve society in the quarrel. Others are altogether as revengeful. The mere suspicion of wrong transports them beyond all sober bounds; and they are very mad-men, till undeceived, or till they have obtained satisfaction. Some are extremely selfish. Their own private interest employs their whole attention. They live but for themselves. And provided they should not be involved in them, they care not what evils befall society. To their ear, the child of affliction addresses his cry in vain. Before their eye, in vain does he display

display his forlorn situation. They can neither see nor hear, when their own interest is not immediately concerned. Others you will find, whose disposition is just the reverse. Their passions and affections have other men for their object. They know not what it is to feel selfish. But, generous and good to a high degree, they bend all their powers to promote the happiness of their fellow-creatures. Some men are naturally proud. In their intercourse with mankind, they can scarcely treat them with common civility. Others are altogether as unassuming. Instead of making the meanest of their species feel his inferiority, they behave towards all with that polite attention, which is due to human nature ; which is indispensable from man to man. In some hearts, there is a prevalence of the malevolent passions. Hence the envy, malice, and uncharitableness, which disgrace many characters. In others, you will perceive the most winning sweetness, the most extensive charity, the most generous good-will. It would be impossible to go over all the particulars, in which men naturally differ from each other. Their spirit is as various as their stature or complexion. He that gave gentleness to the lamb, gave fierceness to the tiger. He, who gave wisdom to the serpent, gave innocence to the dove. And he, who so formed one man, that, without any previous cultivation, he should naturally appear kind, generous, patient, humble, courteous, and, in every view, amiable, so formed another, that he should as naturally discover the opposite temper, unless he took particular pains to correct it. God is the maker of us all. Our temper he originally moulded. Or, to speak more properly, he gave the particular turn to our mind, on which our temper is founded. But as we are intelligent beings,
have

have reason to restrain, as well as passions to urge, our spirit is not incapable of being governed. To rule it, is still the duty of every man : and to this duty I would now call your attention.

It is granted, there is something in us, which we cannot alter, by any assistance, which God has hitherto been pleased to afford us. We cannot change the original constitution of our minds. The particular cause of our natural temper, is not subject to our control. But our temper itself may certainly be governed. And it is our disgrace, that no more attention is paid to this duty. We all own its obligation, when we criticise the conduct of others. We err only, when we make the application to ourselves. Then, indeed, we plead the weakness of human nature, and the violence of passion. And we can rest perfectly satisfied with an excuse, which we admit in no other case whatever.

THE duty of every man is to rule his own spirit ; and in order to this, he must first inquire, what manner of spirit he is of. No person is altogether destitute of any passion or affection belonging to human nature. They all have their place in every bosom. And never was the balance so exactly maintained, but some one would predominate over the rest. In plain words, every man has his ruling passion ; and to discover this, is the first necessary step, in order to the due government of the whole.

AND whoever will seriously examine his own constitution, may certainly make this important discovery. That we are so ignorant of ourselves, is our own fault. If we know not what manner of spirit we are of, it is because we do not inquire. God has given us abilities to investigate our ruling passion : and if we only employ them in the search, we shall
soon

soon discover, whether we are naturally hasty or cool, selfish or generous, proud or humble, ambitious or unambitious, insolent or courteous, timid or brave, sour, morose, captious, severe, or gentle, mild, candid, and universally benevolent. Notwithstanding the supposed difficulty of knowing ourselves, it is not an impossible attainment.

HAVING, therefore, discovered our own natural temper, our predominating passion, we must immediately undertake the conquest of it. This subdued, all others will readily yield. If a man be naturally passionate, and should, by any means, become sensible of it, his first great concern should be, to correct this infirmity. He should call to mind the danger and disgrace of losing the command of himself. He should endeavour to realize his own appearance, when transported with passion. The advantage he gives his enemies, should also be taken into the account. And joined to all these considerations, he should remember, that to conquer his own spirit, will do him more honour, and afford more ground for triumph, than any other conquest he could make. Agreeably to those words of the wise man, "he that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he who taketh a city."

AGAIN—Is a man naturally selfish? To correct this, should be his first object. He should reason with himself upon the meanness of his governing passion. He should consider, that he was not made for himself only. He should turn his eyes to those many examples of generosity, which every age affords. He should compare his own narrow soul with the liberal mind. And he should ask his own heart, whether there was not a greatness in others, and a meanness about him, which rendered him unworthy of

of their society. By a process of this kind, any man might get the better of a selfish spirit; and, instead of being a disgrace to society, might become its greatest blessing.

AGAIN—Upon studying his own natural temper, does a man discover an uncommon share of pride? Does he find a prevailing inclination to magnify himself, and depreciate others? Then let him first attend to this unhappy bias. Both reason and the gospel furnish innumerable lessons against pride. By listening to them, he will soon learn not to “think of himself more highly than he ought.” And having learned this lesson, to govern his temper in other respects will be no very difficult task.

ONCE more—Is a man conscious that the sensual appetites have too great dominion over him? that he is given to the flesh, and disposed to obey it in the lusts thereof? that the fear of man is his particular infirmity? that he is apt to be envious at the prosperity of others, and to feel a malicious pleasure when evil befalls them? that his natural temper is fullen or morose? Is he conscious that in either of these respects he differs from other men, and is exposed to temptations, which many are not? Then let him first endeavour to rectify what is so amiss in himself. When he has reduced his spirit, in those particular instances where it is least governable, he will soon obtain an easy conquest in all others.

We have every motive to attempt the mastery of our passions. Greatly does a man sink beneath himself, when he becomes a slave to them. And most fatal are the consequences of giving them the reins. “He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” He is without any defence against his spiritual enemies. He is in
the

the way of every temptation. And it is morally impossible he should preserve himself from the pollutions, which are in the world. If he be naturally passionate, what mischief may he not do, when violently enraged? He may offer the grossest affront to his best friend. He may blaspheme the God of heaven. He may disturb the peace of society, and expose himself to the deserved punishment of its violated laws. And, what is still worse, he may stain his hands with innocent blood. Of what enormities have not men been guilty, in a fit of passion? What havock have they not made? The language of Jacob, respecting his sons, may be applied to other passionate men. "In their anger, they slew a man; in their wrath, they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel." When he has no rule over his own spirit, a man invites temptation; and may easily be betrayed into every species of violence.

BUT the simile in the text holds good, if applied to any other passion. Self-love, when carried to excess, renders a man defenceless, like a city without walls. Whence come avarice, meanness, and the various arts practised by the men of this world, but from the influence of this principle? Why do we impose upon each other? Why do we oppress and defraud? Why violate the truth, in numberless instances, every day we live? Why continually offend against that plain rule of our Saviour, "to do to others, as we would they should do to us"? The reason is, because we do not rule our selfish spirit. Only subdue this, and society will be sensible of the blessing.

HAS pride the ascendancy in us? how will it endanger our virtue when carried to excess? how un-

suitably will the very proud man behave to his fellow-creatures? Now he will treat them with insolence; now with supercilious contempt. Now he will demand their homage; and now mortify them by his affected condescension. In a variety of ways, will such a detestable character study to make mankind feel their inferiority. How criminal this, in the sight of heaven, let the reason of every man judge. But it is the natural consequence of ungoverned pride. And he, who has a proud spirit, which he will not attempt to rule, hazards not only his innocence in this world, but his well-being in that which is to come.

Every passion has its temptation. Anger, as we have observed, leads to violence; selfishness to dishonesty; pride to insolence; moroseness to incivility; envy to a secret, but malicious pleasure, at the misfortunes of others; and malevolence to every crime which can dishonour and degrade human nature. It is unnecessary to enter into a long detail of the many detestable vices, which spring from ungoverned passion. Only look into the world, and you will there see its fatal effects. A city without walls is not more exposed, than he, who hath no rule over his own spirit. As the one lies at the mercy of every invader, so does the other lie at the mercy of every fiend of darkness.

So fatal, then, the influence of passion; so hazardous, both here and hereafter, let every man study his own natural temper, and endeavour to regulate it by the laws of the gospel. The christian revelation presents us the most excellent rules of moral conduct; its author, the best example. Let us try our temper by the one; let us compare it with that of the other. Every man in this assembly will find,

if

if he examine himself, that some one passion takes the lead. Some sin besets him with more violence than others. On some one particular side, temptation makes its most frequent, and successful attacks. What sin this is, and which is his weakest side, every man may discover, by looking into his own heart. Then search yourselves, and see what is your predominating passion, and endeavour to restrain it within those sober bounds, which reason, and the gospel, prescribe. Remember you are rational beings, and that all excesses of passion are inconsistent with the dignity of your nature. Remember you are Christians, and that they are expressly forbidden by the gospel. Remember, that you are designed for another state of existence, and that all inordinate desires will unfit you for the pure enjoyments of heaven. Fleshly lusts war against the soul; and every other ungoverned appetite is as fatal in its tendency, as pernicious in its consequences.

EVERY motive you therefore have to rule your own spirit; and if you seriously make the attempt, you may promise yourselves all needed assistance. God will graciously aid you in a work so honourable, and so beneficial. If you pray to him, he will give you grace to help in every time of need. He is nigh to all them, who call upon him: and he will ever grant those requests, which are agreeable to his holy will. Wherefore, ask of him, who giveth to all men liberally, and he will give you that wisdom, which is profitable to direct. He will enable you to discover your own spirit; and so to rule it, that you will have no just cause to reproach yourselves in a serious hour.

THE means of governing your peculiar temper, are resolution, exercise, watchfulness, and prayer.

All

All these must be employed, if you would have the habitual command of yourselves. A few indolent wishes, that you may be able to effect this conquest, will answer no end. Many persons lament their particular temper, who use no endeavours to correct it. May you be more consistent. And if you esteem it an unhappiness to be under the dominion of any passion, make a glorious struggle to regain your liberty.

FINALLY—Let those in younger life particularly study their natural temper, and endeavour to gain the mastery over it. If they begin early, they will infallibly succeed. The work will then be comparatively easy. Habits will not be formed. Nor will the mind have acquired that unhappy bias, which yields with so much difficulty in later years. For which reason, begin to govern your temper, as soon as you discover what that temper is. Be resolute and persevering. Watch and pray. Set before your eyes, Jesus Christ, that great ornament of human nature: and if you approve his example, walk as he walked. So will you find the most turbulent passions yielding to the dominion of reason and the gospel. While others are like the troubled sea, which knoweth no rest, you will enjoy a most delightful tranquillity.—While they are defenceless and insecure, you will be like a city surrounded with walls and bulwarks: no enemy will disturb your repose. Free from all danger, you will enjoy yourselves in this world: and in the world to come, will reap the reward of your constancy and zeal. Having overcome, you will sit down with Jesus on his throne, and share his triumphs, his glory, and felicity.

Sermon XXVII.

On the immoderate Love of Pleasure.

2 TIMOTHY, III. 4.**“LOVERS OF PLEASURE, MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD.”**

TO persons in every station and period of life, these words of the inspired apostle are too capable of a general application. Mankind, in all ages of the world, are governed by the same passions, and engaged in the same pursuits. Pleasure, in some form or other, is the object, which attracts them. To this, they sacrifice honour and conscience: to this, they devote their time, their attention, and their noblest powers: and in pursuit of this, they lose sight of pleasures far more exalted in degree, and endless in duration! A humiliating thought! but not more humiliating, than true! Look into the world, examine men of every class. Observe the poor and the rich, the bond and the free. Consider the pursuits of age, and the amusements of the young. Take an impartial view of man, and then say, whether, collectively taken, we are not *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God.*

In these words, the apostle had a particular reference to a degenerate set of Christians, that would appear, in some future period, to the dishonour of the church, and the scandal of their profession. The prophecy is introduced in the following manner: “This know also, that, in the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their
ownelves,

ownelves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God.*" To prepare his son Timothy for such perilous times, and the confusion that would be introduced by such unworthy characters, the apostle thought proper to utter this prediction. And we are too well acquainted with the history of the christian church, not to acknowledge, that, long before this time, it has had its accomplishment.—Soon did the professors of Christianity lose that zeal for God, which was such an ornament to the apostles, and their immediate successors. And too soon might it be objected to *them*, as to the Christians of the present day, that they were *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God.*

THE love of pleasure being, therefore, a prevailing passion, I shall, first, inquire, how far it may be innocently indulged.

SECONDLY—I shall endeavour to show, when men become criminal, in the sense of the text. And,

THIRDLY—I shall point out the inconsistency, the folly, the ingratitude, the danger, of suffering the love of pleasure to interrupt, and much more, to banish the love of God.

FIRST—It may be worth inquiry, how far we may indulge to pleasure, without bringing a reproach upon our religious character. And from the nature and constitution of man, it is evident, that God did not mean to debar him from all those delights, which arise from the moderate gratification of his senses; or which result from his particular situation and circumstances in life. We are surrounded by objects,
evidently

evidently calculated to afford us pleasure. We feel ourselves attracted towards them. And it is unreasonable to suppose the author of our being would have placed us in such a situation, had it been his intention that we should abstain from all pleasures, but those of a moral or intellectual kind. Would not this be unworthy of God? Would it not reflect upon the wisdom and goodness of our creator?

To those, who think seriously upon the subject, it must evidently appear, that man was designed for inferior, as well as superior enjoyments. He is a compound being; he has sense, as well as reason; passions, as well as judgment. While, therefore, the one restrains, he may certainly indulge the other, without acting out of character as a rational being, and a Christian. Neither reason nor religion forbid, that we should enjoy the pleasures of society. We were formed for mutual intercourse. We derive great satisfaction from it. And we should not be better Christians, should we retire from the world, and have no farther commerce with our fellow-creatures. Many have practised this piece of self-denial. But at another day it will appear, that they have ascended no higher in the scale of virtue, than those who partook of an innocent and rational pleasure. However, there is a wide difference between the occasional enjoyment of each other's society, and living in a continual throng. If some retire from the world, others are so immersed in it, as not to have one moment for sober reflection. This error is worse than the former. And when carried to this extreme, the passion for society becomes injurious, and the pleasures of it inconsistent with those nobler pleasures, for which we were designed.

THE same reasoning may be applied to sensual gratifications.

gratifications. Within certain restraints, they are not unlawful. It is a mistake to suppose, we must mortify all those appetites, which God has implanted in us. When the earth yields her increase, we are not to throw back these bounties upon their gracious author. We are not to content ourselves with the scanty morsel, or to slake our thirst at the running stream, because the pleasures of an epicure are mean and degrading. There is a medium in all things; and to observe this medium, is the part of a wise man, and a Christian.

AGAIN—Religion does not forbid occasional relaxation from the business of life, and such amusements as are calculated to promote the health, at the same time that they afford us particular pleasure. Intense application is equally prejudicial to body and mind. "Our strength is not the strength of stones, nor is our flesh of brass." Nature would fail, were it not seasonably relieved, and the greatest relief it finds is innocent amusement. But, to the most undiscerning eye, there must appear an essential difference between occasional relaxation, and a life of indolence; between occasional amusement, and a life of dissipation. The former is perfectly innocent, and necessary for creatures of our rank and constitution. The latter is criminal, is degrading, is attended with very unhappy consequences, both in this world, and in the world to come.

Considering, therefore, the nature of man, his animal desires, and various infirmities, we may conclude, that the pleasures of sense are not, in every degree, absolutely unlawful. The contrary may be inferred from his bodily constitution. For which reason, they have been strangely infatuated, who have supposed, that the mortification of every natu-

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ral desire was an essential part of christian duty.— Need I mention, that enthusiasts of this kind have, at certain periods, swarmed in the church? Many, during the reign of ignorance and superstition, retired from the world, denied themselves the comforts of life, and wore out a miserable existence, in watching, nakedness, toil, and want. This is a sacrifice, that religion never exacted. And he, that voluntarily makes it, proves that he has no just idea of God or his duty; that he is ignorant of the constitution of human nature, and a stranger to the true spirit of the gospel. Thus much I thought it necessary to say, in order to prevent any prejudice, that might be readily conceived against the remaining part of this discourse. For certain it is, all present enjoyment is not inconsistent with our hopes as Christians. Nor is it any proof that a man has not a predominant regard for his creator, because he sweetens his journey by some of those inferior gratifications, which heaven has placed within his reach. He may do this, and yet not be a “*lover of pleasure, more than a lover of God.*”

HAVING thus shown when a man is *not*, I now proceed to inquire, secondly, when he *is* culpable in the sense of the text. And when pleasure is the principal object of his pursuit; when he subordinates every other passion to the love of it; when all his desires and wishes terminate in pleasure, we may then accuse him with the inconsistency, which was foreseen and predicted by the apostle. Of this, we have all, perhaps, many degrading instances within the circle of our own acquaintance. Some men we perceive wholly devoted to the gratification of their sensual appetites. Their only inquiry is, what shall we eat? What shall we drink? Vast sums are daily expended to furnish their tables. And they desire no

other happiness, than to pamper their appetites, and to feast upon those luxuries, which the various parts of the globe contribute to supply. This is indulging the meanest of all passions, and being devoted to the meanest of all pleasures. The epicurean is a disgrace to human nature. His character is drawn by the apostle in a few words, but in words which admirably express the infamy of it. "Whose God is his belly, whose glory is his shame, who minds earthly things." Such unworthy persons there are in the world; and they may be justly said to be *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God*: to prefer a gratification of the most inferior kind, to a more distant, though infinitely superior felicity.

In the same description are those also included, who live in a continual throng; whose only employment it is, to devise some new amusement, or to partake of those fashionable diversions, to which the folly of mankind has given a sanction. We see persons, who have no other idea of life, than a life of pleasure. To devote their time and talents to the service of the public, to seek the good of their own family, or the improvement of their own minds, would be worse than death. For which reason, they never suffer a serious or useful thought to engage their attention. When they rise, it is to enter the gay circle of pleasure, and to banish those foes to the men of this world, time and reflection. As the day is begun, so it is ended, in mirth and recreation. From their conduct, we should be led to suppose, that we were called into existence for no other end, but that we might eat and drink, and rise up to play.

Such an abuse of time, and prostitution of talents, common in all countries, is no singularity in our own. Among us, there are men of pleasure; men, who prefer

prefer the inferior gratifications of sense to the superior joys of religion. And the general tenour of their lives is a most striking comment upon the text.—

Would you know who are *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God*, observe the sons of riot and dissipation. Listen to their vain and frothy conversation. See them forsake the house of worship, for the society of fools: see them desert the wise and good, for the most inferior of the human kind: see them engaged in rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness: see them in the eager pursuit of every forbidden pleasure. Critically examine the man of gallantry, the rake, and debauchee, and you will then see a living comment upon the words of the apostle.

In short, we are all criminal in the sight of God, when pleasure, in any form, diverts our attention from the end of our creation; or when we pursue it to a degree, which rather injures nature, than relieves it. We act a very unworthy part, when we suffer the love of it to banish God from any of our thoughts. When we spend our days in vanity, and those hours, which should be devoted to religion, in the most trifling amusements; when we think it solitude to be alone, and can never endure a moment, but in *their* society, who fondly imagine they have discovered the best improvement of human life; when we prefer men of pleasure to men of religion, the house of entertainment to the house of worship, the productions of a wanton imagination to the sacred scriptures; when, in one word, we do not have a continual respect to God and our duty, even when most intent upon present enjoyment, we may see our own character in the description of the apostle.

BUT I hasten, thirdly, to point out the inconsistency, the ingratitude, the folly, the danger, of suffering the

the love of pleasure to interrupt, much more to extinguish the love of God. And certainly the divine being has an unquestionable right to our supreme affection. We are bound, by the strongest ties, to love and honour him. To him we are indebted for our existence, and the various powers of body and mind. It is he that feeds and clothes us; that raises us, when depressed; that comforts us, when feeble hearted; that crowns us with loving kindness and tender mercy. Nor has he confined his favours to the life which now is. To a nobler and a better state, he has taught us to extend our views; and has promised us, when qualified for it, an everlasting happy existence in the kingdom of glory.

WHEN we consider these things, can we balance one moment, whether God, or the transitory pleasures of this life, shall be the object of our affection? Shall not he, who made and preserves us; he, who has so loved us, as to send his son for our redemption; he, who has provided for us a kingdom, which cannot be moved; he, who has destined us to pleasures, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; shall not he inspire a supreme and unalterable affection? Shall not a being of so much goodness, command our whole hearts? Shall we have any other gods beside him? In point of gratitude, we cannot be lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of him; or, in any one instance, sacrifice duty to an inferior gratification. If we do, we call in question the ingenuity of our hearts; and prove, that we are utterly unpossessed of that lively sense of obligation, which beings, so highly favoured as we are, ought always to entertain.

BUT, secondly—It is not only *ingrateful*, but *INCONSISTENT*, to the last degree, to be *lovers of pleasure*,

ure, more than lovers of God. We profess to be Christians; and as such, have come into a solemn engagement to love God with all our hearts, with all our soul, with all our strength, with all our mind. This is the first and great commandment. To this we have yielded our unfeigned assent; and we cannot but own the justice and obligation of it. And shall we dare to violate a law, which we know to be founded in strict justice? Shall we transgress a command, to which we have solemnly subscribed? Shall we own in words, what we disown in reality? The inconsistency of such behaviour must be apparent to all, who are not blinded by their lusts, and hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

As believers in the christian revelation, we ought to devote our whole souls to the love, and all our powers to the service of our maker. By embracing that religion, we profess to look with a comparative indifference upon all the pleasures of time and sense. Whatever our practice may be, it is our language, that in heaven there is none like God; nor on earth, any to be compared unto him. Wherefore, in us, it is the height of inconsistency, to lead a life of pleasure, regardless of our honour, our true interest, our religious profession, and our God. It is utterly irreconcilable with our nature as men; and much more so, with our obligations as the disciples of the blessed Jesus.

BUT, thirdly—It is extreme folly to suffer any present gratification to steal away our affections from the author of our being. It is a preference that reflects upon our understanding. It shews that we have no moral taste, and that our spiritual discernment is greatly vitiated. Is it folly to prefer a shadow to the substance, a glittering toy to a real gem? much

Much greater folly is it to prefer a mere flash of joy, to those endless pleasures, which are connected with the love of our maker, and which will infallibly flow from it as its future reward. Granting we might indulge every desire of the flesh and the mind; granting we might range the whole field of forbidden pleasure; should we procure any real satisfaction, should we enjoy any lasting felicity? by no means. The pleasures of sense are but for a season. They are like the morning cloud and early dew. It is but a moment we are capable of enjoying them; and when past, they leave the most tormenting reflections behind. Can any man, can any Christian, then, be devoted to pleasures so fleeting and unsubstantial? Is it not madness to pursue them with that ardour, which is so common with men of the world?

BUT, fourthly—An inordinate love of pleasure is attended with extreme danger, as the natural tendency of it is to prevent our spiritual improvement, and unfit us for those immortal joys, which are promised in the gospel. He that liveth in pleasure, is dead while he liveth; dead to the charms of virtue, and beauty of holiness; dead to the true end of his creation; dead to all those moral purposes, for which the divine being gave him existence. Though he may have a name to live, yet such a person is spiritually dead.

AND the hazard is extremely great, that he will fail of that happiness, which is promised to the righteous in the resurrection-state. How can he enjoy that being, who is not the object of his highest affection? How can he relish the pleasures of that state, when the pleasures of time and sense have engrossed his whole attention? In heaven, there are no sensual gratifications. The gospel paradise is not like

like that of Mahomet : it is not such as an epicurean, or a debauchee, would invent. Its joys are pure and spiritual ; they are the joys of angels, and not the short-lived extasies of a sensualist. Wherefore, the sensualist will be excluded from them, as not only unworthy, but incapable of tasting such exalted felicity !

SUCH, my hearers, being the inconsistency, the folly, the ingratitude, the danger of an inordinate love of pleasure, let me caution you against this debasing passion. * At this period, we are peculiarly exposed to the hazard of preferring pleasure to our duty ; and the vain amusements of this world, to the promised joys of that which is to come. A spirit of dissipation pervades all orders. Instead of a patriotic solicitude for the good of our country ; instead of a pious concern for the good of our souls, we appear to be anxious only to gratify our senses, and seize our share of present pleasure, as we pass through life. Our dissipation, extravagance, and indolence, astonish older countries. They excite the admiration of those who are indifferent about our happiness ; they mortify our friends, and gratify such as wish our ruin.

At a time when we are burdened with a public debt ; when trade is against us ; and our resources not at command ; at such a time, is not an inordinate love of pleasure a fatal passion ? Is it not impolitic in persons, thus circumstanced, to indulge to such amusements, as are attended with great expense, and still greater loss of time ? Will it not bring on embarrassments, from which it will require more than human wisdom to extricate ourselves ? Will not our country essentially suffer, if this spirit prevails ? Consider

* In the year 1785.

sider the natural tendency of it, and ask yourselves what must be the event.

"For the encouragement of piety, virtue, education, and manners, and for the suppression of vice," our commander in chief has issued out his proclamation. Deeply impressed with the importance of the subject, he has called upon the citizens at large, and upon all in authority and influence, upon ministers of the gospel, and instructors of youth, to exert themselves in their several departments, in order to inspire that reverence, which is due to the supreme governor of the world; and to promote those virtues, which only can support our happy constitution. Let us not receive these directions as a matter of course. They are certainly founded in wisdom; and uniform experience must convince us, that if carried into effect, they cannot fail of producing the most happy consequences.

But, before the object of this proclamation can be obtained, we must conquer our unreasonable love of pleasure. The love of pleasure, like the love of money, is the root of many evils. While we retain this passion, we shall be as poor citizens as we are Christians. While we prefer pleasure to God, we shall not reverence his name, or his holy day, his sacred word, or his divine worship. Immersed in pleasure, we shall be lost to all decency of manners, sobriety, temperance, the love of our country, and a generous zeal for its welfare. Profaneness, idleness, gaming, drunkenness, and every other species of vice, naturally grow out of this passion. Wherefore, as members of civil society, let us guard against it; but more especially as the professed disciples of Jesus Christ. Believing and professing a religion, which teaches us better things, let us live and act up

to the spirit of it. Let the time past suffice, and more than suffice, wherein we have served divers lusts, and lived in vanity and pleasure. And for the time to come, let us live like Christians, preferring duty to every present enjoyment, and carefully walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Then may we hope, that God will delight in us, and bless us as a people; that he will extricate us from all our embarrassments; that he will give us favour in the eyes of other nations; that we shall be happy as citizens, happier as Christians; that having turned from the tempting path of forbidden pleasure, we shall be finally admitted to pleasures without alloy, and joys that never fade.

Sermon XXVIII.

On Friendship.

JOHN XXI. 20.

“THEN PETER, TURNING ABOUT, SEETH THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED.”

FROM various circumstances in his life, it appears, that our blessed Saviour was no stranger to the social affections; but enjoyed, in a very high degree, the pleasures of society and friendship. The companions of his youth, or those with whom he formed the earliest connexion, are not particularly mentioned in the sacred pages. But, no sooner had

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he assumed the character of a public teacher, than we find him associating with persons; whom he had chosen for his companions and friends, to whom he unbosomed himself, and with whom he lived in the most familiar and agreeable manner. Of these highly favoured objects of his affection, one enjoyed an uncommon share of his confidence and love. That was John. Something our Lord saw in his character, which raised him above the other disciples, and rendered him more worthy of his high regard. Accordingly he was admitted to the greatest intimacy with the blessed Jesus. He was known to be the favourite disciple. And he was emphatically styled, *the disciple whom Jesus loved.*

THIS circumstance leads to some very serious and useful reflections. It is capable of a wise improvement by us, for whose instruction it was recorded. And with this view I have made it the subject of my discourse.

IN the first place, I shall consider the generous and ardent affection, which warmed the bosom of our divine Lord.

SECONDLY—the object and foundation of it.

THIRDLY—the manner of its operation. And,

FINALLY—the conclusions we are to draw from this circumstance in our Saviour's life, and the moral lessons it inculcates upon us.

FIRST—I am to consider the generous and ardent affection, which the Lord Jesus entertained for one of his disciples. This did not interfere with his compassionate regard for the whole human kind.—He loved all the apostate children of men; and he was ready to lay down his life for their sake, though he did not discover in them, those virtues and graces, which were so attractive in the character of John.—

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Little minds cannot, at the same time, entertain many objects. If they love one, they are too apt to hate others; and if they hold to one, to despise others. That they cannot be true to a friend, without rejecting the rest of mankind, seems to be a prevailing sentiment with many, who would be thought to possess the social feelings in a very high degree. ~~SHOULD~~ any, here present, entertain this illiberal idea, they may be undeceived by the example of our Lord. He was universally benevolent, while he supported the amiable character of a private friend. He loved his very enemies, while he loved his disciple John. His affection for this desirable object did not blind his eyes to the good qualities of other men, nor render him indifferent about their fate. With feelings of the most tender, and distressing nature, he beheld the ruined state of mankind. He saw that all had gone astray: that the paths of virtue and religion were deserted: that darkness had overspread the land, and thick darkness the nations: that a corrupt and debasing superstition had usurped the place of rational piety: that there were none good: and that mankind must perish without his assistance. All this he saw, and it excited his compassion. Private friendship did not divert his attention from these miserable objects, nor indispose him to the common offices of humanity. His heart was large enough to entertain the beloved disciple, and all whose moral state pleaded for mercy.

FROM what has been said, you may form, then, a just idea of the feelings, with which our blessed Saviour regarded one of his followers; and of the nature and degree of that friendship, which is ascribed to him in the text. He loved the amiable John, as one good man loves another, in whom he discovers something

something beyond the common standard of human excellence. His affection was rational, pure, and ardent. It was not to turn with every tide; to change with accident; or to wear out with time. It was not like the fickle friendship of the men of this world, which is no more than a mercenary league, that will terminate, of course, when interest no longer binds them. The affection, which our Lord professed, he really entertained. And the love, with which he honoured his disciple John, was of that kind, which many waters could not quench, nor even floods drown. It had a sure foundation. And it was productive of no injury to the rest of mankind.

From the affection itself, I proceed, in the second place, to a more particular consideration of the object and ground of it. And it is very reasonable to suppose, our Lord would not have admitted John to the honour of his friendship, had there not been something uncommonly attractive in his character. Jesus Christ acted, in no instance, from mere caprice. He was a stranger to those groundless prejudices, which have a surprising influence over the human heart. He was incapable of them. For every part of his conduct, he could always assign a just reason. If, therefore, he did actually prefer John to his other disciples, it was because there was something in him, which they could not boast, and which rendered him, on the whole, deserving of this preference.

AND if we carefully examine and compare the accounts we have of this beloved disciple, we shall find, he was a most amiable and exalted character. The sacred writers have not, indeed, enlarged upon his story. And modesty would not suffer him to entertain the world with his own memoirs. We may, however,

however, collect so many particulars relative to him, as to justify the conclusion, that, of all the disciples, John had the best claim to the private friendship of his Lord.

A VERY distinguishable trait in his character, is a principle of universal benevolence. All his writings breathe this most excellent spirit. His epistles are but a comment upon the nature and obligation of christian love. To this test, he brings all the professed believers in the religion of Jesus; by this, he tries their sincerity; and as they abound in charity, or appear destitute of it, he pronounces them children of God, or the devil. I must quote a great part of his epistles, was I to produce every thing he has advanced in favour of this godlike habit. He has certainly drawn a most beautiful portrait of christian benevolence. And, without all dispute, he has taken the likeness from his own heart. In describing the benevolent spirit of the gospel, he has only given a description of his own temper.

Thus amiable in his disposition, thus formed for love, and habitually inclined to do good, no wonder the blessed Jesus conceived a most tender affection for this disciple. His heart was so much like his own, that he could not resist the natural desire of entering into the most endearing connexion with him. He saw a breast warmed and expanded with pure benevolence. He beheld a soul endued with that amiable sensibility, which does honour to human nature. He saw, in short, a miniature of himself; one, who was actuated by similar motives; one, who felt a generous regard for all his species; whose love was without dissimulation, and who could conceive of no higher felicity, than in promoting the happiness of his fellow-creatures. Finding such an excellent disposition

position among the children of men, he thought proper, therefore, to distinguish it by his particular approbation. Accordingly, John was admitted to his friendship, and honoured beyond the other disciples, as bearing a nearer resemblance of his heavenly master.

A superior degree of benevolence was a very just ground for that superior affection, which the beloved disciple inspired. Whom do we most admire? Who do most effectually insinuate themselves into our hearts? The hero, the philosopher, the rich, the powerful are these the persons, with whom we are most delighted? Their actions do we secretly applaud? And if we speak the genuine sentiments of our hearts, shall we proclaim them the objects of our undissimbled affection? by no means. They may excite our fears, or inspire our admiration; but, unless they resemble the object before us, in the benevolent part of his character, it is impossible they should win our souls. We may flatter, but we cannot love. We may address them in the language of friendship, but it is impossible we should entertain that ardent affection, with which this language ought always to be accompanied. He only, who possesses the happy temper of this apostle, can be the real object of our regard. The friend of Christ must be our friend, if we have any ideas of moral excellence, or know any distinction of character.

It appears, then, that our blessed Saviour had a particular regard for his disciple John; and that his amiable temper was the probable ground of his superior affection. I do not mention this, to derogate from his other virtues. No doubt he had the zeal of Peter, without his rashness; that his faith was equally strong; that in time of danger, he was more intrepid;

intrepid; and that he was conspicuous for all those graces, which adorned the early followers of our divine Lord. From no circumstance in his life, can we conclude, that he was inferior to the other disciples in any respect. Benevolence, however, being a very conspicuous part of his character, this will naturally account for the preference shewn him.

HAVING considered the fact itself, *that Jesus had a particular friend*; and endeavoured to assign the reason why JOHN was admitted to this honour, I proceed, thirdly, to the manner in which our Lord expressed his generous regard. And no doubt, in the presence of his other disciples, he might often testify his superior affection for this amiable follower. Certain it is, the fact was known to the whole body. It was a prevailing idea among them, that John was a favourite with their master; and that he might presume upon freedoms, which it would be improper for them to take. This, however, did not excite their envy. Either they were themselves convinced of the superior merit of this disciple, or they had so deeply imbibed the spirit of their master, as to be incapable of this base passion.

BUT if our Lord did not openly profess his superior affection for this one distinguished follower, yet it was undoubtedly evident from the general tenour of his conduct towards him. The sacred writers particularly mention, that he lay on Jesus' breast. This was a singular honour; and it plainly discovered how dear he was to that illustrious personage, who treated him with such a tender familiarity. Nothing could better indicate the undisguised friendship subsisting between them.

BESIDES this expression of his sincere regards, it is probable our Lord intrusted him with many secrets,

crets, which he did not reveal to his other disciples. This may be suspected from a particular request they once made, when their fears and curiosity had been greatly excited. Jesus was saying, that one of his disciples should betray him. A prediction, so unexpected, filled them with surprise and consternation. They looked on one another with evident marks of confusion, doubting of whom he spake. "Now, (says the evangelist) there was leaning on Jesus' bosom, one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter, therefore, beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be, of whom he spake. He then, lying on Jesus' breast, saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, he it is, to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it." This circumstance, though unimportant, in itself considered, yet is a very natural and tender expression of our Lord's regard for his favourite disciple. It shewed how ready he was to gratify him; and that no reasonable request should be refused, when made by a person, for whom he entertained such high regard.

BUT our Lord gave a still greater testimony of his affection for John, when he intrusted him with the future events relative to the church, and made him the honoured instrument of conveying them to the christian world. Long after the other disciples had sealed the truth of Christianity with their blood, John survived, to bear witness of the wonderful scenes which were soon to be exhibited. Being sent to the isle of Patmos, by order of Domitian, the great head of the church appeared to him. And there he unfolded to him the things, which then were, and which should be hereafter; gave him a comprehensive view of the present and future state of religion; and ordered him to commit the whole

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to writing, for the benefit of those who should believe. This was an unquestionable proof of his affection. It was an expression of it, the most grateful to a good mind. To be the instrument of conveying instruction or comfort to his fellow-christians, must have afforded the highest pleasure to this benevolent person.

In the last scene of our Saviour's life, we have a striking evidence of his affection for his friend; of the confidence he reposed in him, and the return he expected. Beholding, from the cross, his weeping mother, he was moved with compassion. And for consolation and support, he justly supposed, he could not refer her to a better person than his beloved friend. Accordingly, he addressed her in that tender language, "woman, behold thy son!" Then turning to John, he said, "behold thy mother: and from that hour, the disciple took her to his own house." The affection, he once entertained for his divine master, he willingly transferred to his honoured parent; and he thought it but a small return for the numerous favours he had received, and the confidence reposed in him by one, to whom he was under eternal obligations. This was a tender scene! The character of our Saviour, and his disciple, it exhibited to great advantage. It was a proof of the tender sentiments which the one entertained: and it most nobly displayed the gratitude of the other.

THE friendship subsisting between our Lord and his apostle, is full with instruction. The conclusions we are to draw from the fact itself, and the moral lessons it inculcates upon us, were the last thing proposed to our consideration. And from this circumstance in the life of our Saviour, we cannot but observe how unjustly Christianity has been attacked by

some modern infidels. It has been alleged, by way of objection to the gospel, that it discouraged private friendship. This has been represented as a great defect in the system itself, if not a conclusive argument against its divine original. But they who reason after this manner, have surely never examined the religion they affect to despise. The spirit of the gospel is a spirit of love. The precepts of it lay a foundation for the most generous and lasting friendship.— And certainly the example of our Lord proves, beyond all contradiction, that it is not only innocent, but laudable, to select out of the mass of mankind one, to whom we may disclose the most secret recesses of the soul; upon whom we may confide in all time of adversity, and to whom we may repair for that counsel, assistance, and consolation, we may ever need. The conduct of our blessed Saviour is equivalent to a precept. And his example, particularly as it respected John, we may safely and honourably follow.

WHILE, then, we cultivate a perpetual flow of good will towards the whole human kind, we are at liberty to have our private friends, and to enjoy all that rational pleasure, which flows from such a connexion. As Jesus was strongly attached to the most deserving of his followers, so may we place our warm affection upon such as apparently resemble this beloved disciple. There may be some among the human kind, upon whom we place unbounded confidence. In their society we shall enjoy the highest pleasure. By their friendly commiseration, they will alleviate our sorrows. By their generous congratulations, they will double our joys. They will admonish us when we go astray; and encourage us when restored to the path of duty. From their counsel, instruction, and reproof, we shall derive inconceivable pleasure
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and advantage. Who, then, would not wish for a friend; one who has just pretensions to the name? Who that has any regard to his interest and happiness, would refuse the most intimate connexion with the man, who is formed for society, who has a high relish for the social pleasures, and who would not violate the trust reposed in him!

SECONDLY—The conduct of our Lord teaches us to be very careful in the choice of our friends. He, who knew every heart, did not trust himself indiscriminately to all. In Judas, he early perceived the seeds of treachery and deceit. He knew that avaricious traitor waited only for an opportunity to deliver him into the hands of his enemies. For which reason he did not commit himself to him, with the same confidence, as to his other disciples. Peter, he was sensible, had zeal and affection: but then our Lord could not be ignorant, that, in many respects, he was an inconsistent character. He was made up of courage and cowardice, strength and weakness, zeal and irresolution; and therefore the blessed Jesus did not choose to make him a particular confident and friend. With the private character of his other disciples, we are not sufficiently acquainted to assign a reason, why the choice did not fall upon them. No doubt, he perceived some defect in them, which was abundantly supplied in the person of his choice. Accordingly, John was most tenderly beloved; John lay upon his breast; John was entrusted with his secrets, and John was honoured with certain marks of affection, which were not indiscriminately bestowed upon all.

THIS teaches us to be very cautious in the choice of those, with whom we propose to live on terms of the greatest intimacy and affection. A bad man cannot

not be a good friend. An illiberal, malignant heart is incapable of disinterested love. The seeds of friendship will perish in such a soil. We must choose our friends from among the virtuous and good, or we shall be deceived by an empty name. Benevolence should be the great qualification. And of this we may be assured, the nearer any character approaches to that of the disciple John, the more worthy it will be of our esteem and confidence. A generous, liberal, benevolent soul cannot descend to an unworthy action; cannot deceive, betray; cannot disappoint our fondest expectations.

THIRDLY—From the example of our Lord, we learn how a rational, disinterested affection ought to operate. Because the blessed Jesus entertained a particular regard for a worthy and deserving follower, this did not render him blind to his faults, did not make him indifferent about his other disciples, nor divert his attention from the glorious errand on which he came. John shared in his reproofs, in common with others. When once an excess of friendship betrayed him into a rash proposal, he was plainly told, he knew not what manner of spirit he was of. Christ was not so prejudiced, as to overlook his rashness; nor so partial, as to let it pass without a severe reproof. This shews he was no flatterer; that he loved not in profession only, but in deed and in truth.

As to his great regard for his other followers, and generous good will to all mankind, we have undoubted evidence of them. With what pleasure did he go about continually doing good? How kind was he, even to the evil and unthankful? With what anguish of soul did he behold their obstinate infidelity? How ardently did he pray, that they might come to the

the knowledge of the truth, and be saved? And how patiently did he at last suffer, the just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God? All this indicates a flow of good will, uninterrupted and universal!

LIKE the son of God, we should therefore, while true to a friend, be just and benevolent towards all. We should not suffer one object to engross our whole affection. Much less should we flatter and deceive the person, whom we profess to honour with our friendship. Partiality is the mark of a weak mind. To overlook those faults in one, which we severely condemn in others, is the height of injustice. Let love, therefore, be without dissimulation. And let friendship display itself by every kind office, and, particularly, by reproving, correcting, and instructing in righteousness.

FINALLY—The choice, which our Saviour made, as to an object of affection, teaches us what temper we must cultivate, and how we must behave, in order to secure his regard. He was particularly delighted with John, because John was possessed of a more amiable disposition than the generality of his followers. They had many excellent qualities; but they had not the benevolence of this divine person. His heart was made of tenderness. He loved his master: he loved his fellow-disciples: he loved all men. His breast was unruffled by those disorderly passions, which torment other souls, and do such incredible mischief to society. He felt no envy. He studied no revenge. Except in that unguarded moment, when he would have called for a judgment upon the ingrateful Samaritans, we see nothing in him but piety, benevolence, and love.

THESE being the attractives, which first caught the attention, and afterwards secured the friendship of
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our Lord, we cannot be at a loss to determine how the same honour may be secured to ourselves. By cultivating the temper of John, and exercising his benevolence, we shall approve ourselves to him, who is love, who dwells in love, and who has given infallible proofs of his ardent affection for mankind. As we delight in doing good, so will he delight in us. As we abound in charity, so will he abound in affection. And could we possibly surpass the beloved disciple in goodness of heart, we should be honoured with a higher degree of confidence and love, than was ever bestowed on that favoured object.

LET it then be our great concern to abound in charity, to cherish a perpetual flow of good will, and to be conspicuous for those amiable qualities, which recommended the excellent disciple, John, to the friendship of his Lord. Love, my hearers, is the fulfilling of the law. A benevolent disposition will exalt us above the world, will render us like the angels of heaven, will make us partakers of the divine nature. By a spirit of love we shall promote our own happiness, and highly recommend the religion we profess. If we live in love and peace, the God of love and peace will bless us. Jesus will behold us with an eye of pure affection. He will say to the attendants around him, behold my true and faithful disciples, who have imbibed the spirit of my religion, and live together as members of the same body. For these blessed objects, crowns of unfading glory are already prepared. Yet a little while, and I shall receive them to myself, that where I am, they may be also. In my father's house, they shall receive new and continual tokens of my favour. For mutually blest in the affection of each other, they are capable of superior happiness, and they are worthy.

Sermon

Sermon XXIX.

On the Love of God, and the Love of Man.

1 TIMOTHY, 1. 5.

“NOW THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT IS CHARITY, OUT OF A PURE HEART, AND OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE, AND OF FAITH UNFEIGNED.”

I HAVE often had occasion to mention the errors, which corrupted Christianity, soon after its publication; and the enemies, which its early preachers were called to encounter. Among the latter, none were more formidable than some, who had been educated in the Jewish schools. And among the former, none could have a worse effect than certain doctrines, which originated in the East; and then made a part of the Jewish philosophy. Whilst the apostle Paul was employed in propagating the pure religion of Christ, the teachers of these doctrines were using their utmost endeavours to defeat his labours. Wherever he had planted a church, they insinuated themselves. And to spread the poison of heresy with success, they made no scruple to deny his divine commission, as an apostle; and the excellency of his character, as a Christian.

THE disciples at Ephesus were among those, on whom the arts of seduction were employed. The false teachers had found their way into that city. To defeat their arts, the apostle, therefore, requests his son Timothy to stay at Ephesus; and he enjoins it upon him, to warn the Ephesians against giving heed

heed to fables and endless genealogies. He observes, that the tendency of such visionary speculations is angry debate, and not edification. And he informs him, that some had already turned aside to vain jangling. As these pernicious errors were the occasion of that admirable remark, which we find in the text, it may not be amiss to give some account of them.

BEFORE the days of our Saviour, the oriental philosophy had been introduced to Judea: and the more learned of the Jews endeavoured to incorporate its principles with those of their own religion. One of those principles relates to the production of heaven and earth, and their respective inhabitants. According to that philosophy, there existed from everlasting one eternal nature; in which dwelled the fulness of wisdom, goodness, and all other perfections. This nature was represented as a pure and radiant light, diffused through the immensity of space. But, after a profound solitude and blessed tranquillity from ages of ages, the eternal nature produced from itself, two minds of a different sex, which resembled the supreme parent in the most perfect manner. And from their union arose others, which were followed by succeeding generations, till a celestial family was formed. In process of time, one of this family descended from the mansions of light; created man, and the various ranks of inferior beings, and prepared the earth for their reception. Thus, descending from the Deity to the lowest reptile, we perceive a chain, one end of which was supported by the throne of God, and the other rested on the earth. And as this chain was formed of innumerable links; In other words, as innumerable generations intervened between the eternal and the lowest created

created nature, the term, endless genealogies, is very pertinently used by the apostle.

To this vain philosophy, St. Paul justly opposes the simplicity and design of the gospel. "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." The benevolent nature, and moral tendency of the gospel, could not be better expressed. The great end of the christian doctrine is not to render men quarrelsome, but to incline them to peace and love. It is not to intoxicate them with learned pride, but to teach them humility. It is not to furnish merely a subject for conversation, but something, which they are to observe and practise. The end of the commandment is not, in short, a system of religious opinions treasured up in the mind, but the love of God, and the love of man, established in our hearts, supported and animated by a principle of faith, operating agreeably to the dictates of a good conscience, and exerting a steady influence over our temper, conversation, and actions. This is pure Christianity; Christianity, as it existed in the hearts, and governed the behaviour of its early preachers, and worthy professors; Christianity, as it appeared, before it was obscured by metaphysick, or corrupted by science, falsely so called; and Christianity, in the form which it will hereafter assume, should the light of the glorious gospel of Christ irradiate the world.

BUT these general remarks will not do justice to the words, which introduce the discourse. Presuming on your serious attention, I shall, therefore, undertake to give the subject a particular examination.

THE apostle begins: "Now the end of the commandment is *charity*." By the commandment, he means the christian religion; and the end of it is

the moral effect, which its author contemplated, when he communicated this religion to mankind. And, according to St. Paul's ideas of Christianity, this end is accomplished, when it produces in the hearts of its sincere believers, a principle of unfeigned love to God, and love to man. Charity, in a more limited sense, would not express the sentiment of the apostle. And we should do great injustice to his argument, if we were not to affix to this term, that exalted idea, which it evidently conveys in many parts of the sacred scripture.

If, for instance, by *charity*, we were to understand alms-giving, it would not be true, that it is the end of the commandment. Many precepts, it is acknowledged, recommend this duty: and without an habitual attention to it, in vain does any man pretend to be a Christian. To say to a brother or sister, when naked and destitute, be thou warmed or filled; and, at the same time, to withhold those things which are necessary, is virtually to renounce the gospel. But still, the man who gives to the poor, does not do all which Christianity requires. Looking round on the objects, which have experienced his beneficence, he cannot say, "what lack I yet?" For the truth is, many other virtues, besides alms-giving, are positively enjoined by the son of God, and recommended by his example.

FURTHER—Indulgence towards those, who differ from us in their religious opinions; or a charitable allowance for their errors, is not the sole end of the commandment. To distinguish between mistakes of the understanding and depravity of the heart, is, indeed, the duty of all, who admit the divine authority of the gospel. And the person, who does not exercise this temper towards others, is very far from the kingdom

kingdom of God. To set up our own opinions as the standard of evangelical truth; and to require all others to subscribe to them, is taking a liberty with our fellow-christians, which no argument can justify. We know, that there are good men of all persuasions. We know, that a spirit of true piety, a benevolent temper, and a good life, may consist with errors, in regard to points of mere speculation. And every man of inquiry is convinced, that a perfect religious uniformity of sentiment is unattainable in the present state. Why, then, should we not bear with each other? Towards those, who cannot subscribe to all our opinions, why should we suffer our affections to cool? And why, on this account, should any root of bitterness spring up, and trouble us? To suffer our prejudices to gain such a triumph over our benevolence, is to proclaim our ignorance of the genius of the gospel, and our disrespect of the purest and best example, that ever delighted the eyes of mankind.

BUT though we ought to be warmed with this species of charity, yet it is not the whole duty of Christians. Let any man recur to the sacred volume, and he will find that his moral obligations do not terminate in thinking well of others. He will find the offices of piety and justice no less inculcated, than those of humanity. The inspired pages will present a variety of rules relating to the temper and life.— And he will perceive that humility, devotion, the forgiveness of injuries, temperance, chastity, and numberless other virtues, are indispensably requisite to the christian character. The inquiry, therefore, returns, what is the *end* of the commandment, as stated by the apostle?

If we attend to the import of the word *charity*, we shall

shall be furnished with a ready answer to this question. The charity, which is so highly recommended in the writings of St. Paul, and which is the subject of so many exhortations, is *love* in general; love to God, and love to his creatures. And wherever this principle is formed, there the end of the gospel is effected. For a supreme love of God and man must produce every Christian and moral virtue. If we love the author of our being with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, we shall yield a willing obedience to all his commandments. This principle will constrain us to meditate on his perfections; to rejoice in his government; to submit to the dispensations of his providence; to be penitent for our sins; to be thankful for his mercies; to pray to him for the things which we want; and to refer ourselves to his disposal. This principle will dispose us to every office of piety. We shall find no disinclination to any duty enjoined by our moral governor, so long as he is the object of our supreme affection. Love will make every command, on his part, welcome; and on ours, every act of submission delightful. The great herald of peace and mercy will likewise receive the homage of our hearts, if this sacred principle be in us, and abound. For to honour the son as we honour the father, must result from such a love of God, as answers to the requisition of the gospel.

AGREEABLY to this description, the love of God is styled the first and great commandment. And with great reason, for it secures obedience to all subordinate laws. A child, who loves a parent, will cheerfully comply with every intimation of his will. And a Christian, who has so far overcome the world, and the things of the world, as to love God supremely, will feel a constant stimulus to obedience. Submis-

five to the first and great commandment, he will need no argument to persuade him to pray to his maker, to confide in him, to acquiesce in his appointments, to study his will, or to do any thing, which comes under the general description of living soberly and piously in the world. Hence, the frequent injunctions to love God fervently and steadily. And hence, the observation, that love is the fulfilling of the law.

BUT, next to a supreme affection for our maker, we are reminded of that which is due to our fellow-men. And as the former is a security for obedience in general, so is the latter for a faithful discharge of every social duty. If we love our neighbour as ourselves, we cannot do him a deliberate wrong. So far from it, we shall delight in doing him good, and in promoting his peace and happiness in every form, and as often as an opportunity shall present. The species of charity, which I am now considering, will not suffer us to violate the laws of justice and truth. We shall defraud and oppress no man. We shall slander and misrepresent no one. Envy will be a stranger to our bosoms, and detraction to our tongues. Conforming to the great law of brotherly love, we shall, in all cases, do to others, as we would that they should do to us. And mutually disposed to kind offices, we shall have a foretaste of the happiness, which awaits us in a better world.

If we examine the many crimes, which disturb society, we shall be able to trace them up to a want of that charity, which is here recommended. Why do men take an advantage of the necessities and ignorance of their neighbours? because they do not love them as themselves. Why do they ever break their promises? from a defect in this principle. Why do they

they censure and condemn; why indulge themselves in evil speaking; and why take any liberties with the reputation of others? because they have not that love which Christianity requires. And to what cause but this, can we ascribe the many interruptions, to which human happiness is exposed, not only in the world at large, but in the smaller circle of our families and friends? Let the divine principle of love have its proper influence, and this earth would become a paradise. For it is a sacred truth, that "love worketh no ill to our neighbour." So far, therefore, as social duty is considered, love must be the end of the commandment.

THESE remarks will sufficiently explain that part of the text, which is under our immediate consideration. We find that love, taken in its largest sense, is the great end contemplated by the christian revelation: because this principle, when it has its full operation, will necessarily produce all those virtues, which are prescribed by the gospel. But the apostle goes on to observe, respecting charity, that it proceeds from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Let us attend to this description.

It is not every thing, that men denominate charity, which deserves that exalted name. As enthusiastick fervours are sometimes mistaken for christian devotion, so are our animal instincts and constitutional feelings for christian charity. But the divine principle, which is the end of the commandment, has its foundation, not in the animal, but the moral part of our nature. First, it proceeds from a pure heart. The love of God and man does not co-exist with any vile or sensual affections. The heart, in which it is seated, is purified from pride, envy, malice, selfishness, impatience, and every unchaste or vicious inclination.

nation. To pretend to love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves, whilst we harbour any impure affection, is equally hypocritical and absurd.

I AM sensible, that the forms of devotion may be observed, and acts of kindness performed, where the heart is in a very corrupt state. Men may worship God to be seen of others : and they may do good from motives of private interest. Instances of this, every age and community may furnish. But the charity of the gospel is a principle, which cannot consist with any vicious propensity. Wherever the love of God and man predominate, there the heart must be cleansed from every pollution ; the passions and affections must be regulated ; and every thing within must be right with God.

SECONDLY—A good conscience must accompany the exercise of christian charity. Devotion without common morality, and beneficence without honesty, are a strange contradiction. And yet, how often do we meet with persons apparently serious and charitable, who must feel the scourges of an unapproving conscience, whenever they reflect on their unrighteous behaviour ? In how many instances have prayers and alms been employed to cover a multitude of sins ? To enjoy a good conscience, we must be able to look back on an uniform course of obedience. We must feel assured, that we have not attempted a composition with our maker ; that we have not had recourse to piety, in order to supply any moral defect ; and that our liberality to some, has not been injustice to others. Unless we have this testimony, we have yet to acquire that charity, which is the great end of religion.

FINALLY—The love of God and man must not only be seated in a pure heart, and exercised with a
good

good conscience, but must be preserved and excited by faith unfeigned. The Christian religion draws such a character of God, that it is almost impossible not to love him. And it points out our relation to others with so much clearness, and gives us such views of our duty and its consequences, that we cannot want a motive to beneficence, which the gospel does not supply. For these reasons, our charity should be kept alive by a firm persuasion, that the laws of Christianity are divine, and its promises certain. And, if we have this faith in the religion of Jesus, it will naturally work by love; and incline us to every office of piety and goodness.

Thus have I shown the end of the commandment, namely, *love* to the supreme being, and *love* to his creatures, proceeding from a pure heart, operating agreeably to the dictates of a good conscience, and kept in exercise by an unfeigned belief of Christianity. But are these the views of religion generally entertained by its professors? Arguing from their temper and actions, should we suppose, that love is the fulfilling of the law? If actions may be allowed to speak, they will express a very different sentiment. The behaviour of some Christians will lead us to conclude, that the end of the commandment is a certain mode of thinking, joined to a rancorous prejudice against all, who dissent from them. How many persons are there, who have no other religion than such as I have now mentioned? Points of mere speculation, advanced with confidence, and maintained with an intemperate zeal, constitute the whole of their Christianity. To think right, is of great importance; but it is not every thing, in the view of religion. The affections and the will are not less respected in the preceptive part of Christianity,

ity, than the understanding. Such, therefore, as have only opinions to produce, as the work of religion, have fatally overlooked the end of the commandment.

OTHERS there are, whose actions would lead us to believe, that the great purpose, for which Christianity was introduced, was to make men attentive to rites and forms, and zealous for all ceremonies, not excepting those of the most extravagant nature. Their faith has no other effect, than to produce a ceremonial righteousness : and their profession is verified by the stress, which they lay on the mere appendages of religion. But "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy." The end, for which Christ came into the world, was not to exalt these trifles to objects of importance, but to make men pious and benevolent. Even institutions of divine appointment are but the means of religion. So far only as they conduce to promote a spirit of piety, and to confirm the principles of benevolence, are they of importance in the view of Christianity.

LET these considerations correct our mistakes, as to the nature and end of religion ; and lead us to estimate our christian character by some other rule, than a zeal for mere opinions, or an attention to outward forms. Without charity, we can have no just claim to the title of Christians, or the rewards promised in the gospel. Our faith, and our professions, will be of no avail, unless the love of God and man reign in our hearts. To what purpose do we assent to the christian revelation, unless we conform to its great design ? Better were it not to have known the divine commandment, than to overlook its great end, which is comprehended in the word *charity*. Char-

ity, in the christian sense, is all in all. This divine principle will incline you to every good work. It will dispose you to reverence the supreme being; and to yield that homage, which he has required, with cheerfulness and pleasure. It will lead you to be patient and resigned, whatever may be your condition in this world. And will constrain you to do good to all, who stand in need of your friendly offices. Under its influence, you will abstain from every thing injurious to your neighbour, and offensive to God. The various arts of dishonesty, falsehood, and oppression, will be both avoided and reprobated. And your character will display the united charms of devotion, benevolence, and morality. Wherefore, "hear the conclusion of the whole matter: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than this."



Sermon XXX.

On the Abuse of parental Authority.

GENESIS XXVII. 13.

“AND HIS MOTHER SAID UNTO HIM, UPON ME BE
THY CURSE, MY SON : ONLY OBEY MY VOICE.”

IS it possible to read these words, and not to reflect, with indignation, on the partial and wicked spirit, by which they were suggested? To one, who stands in the relation, and exercises the authority of a parent, the want of judgment is a real misfortune. But the want of principle is infinitely worse, as it proves the heart to be in fault rather than the head; and as it converts a guardian into a tempter. The parental character, thus changed and prostituted, is the most disgusting object that can be presented to human contemplation.

THE words, which I have just read, will, when maturely considered, verify these remarks. They were uttered by a very partial mother, and with the most dishonourable and unrighteous views. Isaac, having grown old, and being apprehensive that he should soon die, called to him his eldest son; directed him to prepare for him a favourable repast; and promised him that his obedience should be followed with that blessing, which the patriarchs were permitted to invoke on their offspring. The son, without delay, repaired to the forest, that he might accomplish the wishes, and receive the blessing of his parent.—During his absence, Rebekah conceived the wicked design

design of imposing on the father, and defrauding the son of that, to which he had an undoubted claim, as the first born. The design was communicated to Jacob. He objected, declaring that it would be impossible to conduct the imposition with success; alleging, that he should be discovered, and that the indignation of Isaac would bring down upon him, not a blessing, but a curse. The text follows: "And his mother said unto him, upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice." The son complied.—The imposition was practised; was detected; and if all the evils, apprehended by Jacob, did not overtake him, yet his life was imbittered by the unworthy part which he had acted. Driven from a parent's house, defrauded by a kinsman, deceived in an article which nearly concerned his happiness, terrified by apprehensions of an injured and avenging brother, afflicted by domestic contentions, and deeply wounded and disgraced by his children, he might well describe his fate in these pathetick terms, "few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been"! The benedictions of a dying parent, obtained in so unjustifiable a manner, were of no essential benefit to Jacob. His posterity enjoyed the blessing: but he was not a happier man than the brother, whom he had supplanted.

I now return to that particular part of his interesting story, which is related in the text. "Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice." These words lead me to remark, in the first place, that parental authority is founded in nature; and that it may be exercised to infinite advantage. Wisdom dictated, that the human kind should appear in succession; that one generation should pass away, and another generation come into existence. And benevo-

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lence suggested, that the experience, gained by some, should be made subservient to the improvement of others. This was more particularly the design of our heavenly father, in the strong affection mutually subsisting in parent and child; in the power conferred on the former, and the submission exacted of the latter. In thus constituting human nature, infinite wisdom and goodness intended, that they, who are instrumental to the existence of others, should also be instrumental in forming their morals, in cultivating their minds, in fitting them to act an honourable part here, and in qualifying them for a happy lot hereafter. That this end may not be defeated, the parent is impelled by the strongest of all affections; and the child is directed by nature to revere the authority, and to submit to the will of those, who sustain this important relation.

CONSIDERING, then, the peculiar constitution of the human kind; considering how some are qualified to direct, and others inclined to be directed, what lasting advantages may be secured by the judicious exercise of parental power? It may be employed to defend and provide for those, whom God has subjected to it. And it may be directed to still higher ends, namely, their intellectual and religious improvement. And this, it is beyond dispute, was the primary object with the author of our being, when he decreed the successive existence of the human species; when he instituted the mysterious relation of parent and child; and when submission on the one part was made to harmonize with authority on the other. By means of this wise provision, the young mind may be early enlightened. The heart may be cultivated at that period, when most susceptible of cultivation; and this world may be made a passage to a better.

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Hence the counsels of revelation, both to those who exercise, and to those who are subject to parental authority. If submission be enjoined on the latter, fidelity is required of the former. If it be an express command of the Deity, "honour thy father and thy mother," it is a command not less explicit, that they, who are destined to receive this honour, should, in a religious sense, be benefactors to their offspring. In other words, to be proper objects of filial piety, they should be preachers of virtue, guardians of innocence, and examples of every good work. Thus responsible is the place of an earthly parent; and thus may he promote the good of those, who want experience and information to choose for themselves.

SECONDLY—It appears from the text, that parental authority may be abused; and that a child may be injured, and even ruined by those, who ought to have been as well the guardians of his virtue, as the protectors of his person. The mother of Jacob was his tempter. Unreasonably partial to him, and over-anxious to promote his interest, she enticed him to deceive his father, and to invade the rights of his brother. So far from recommending truth, sincerity, and justice, she gave a contrary lesson; and enforced it by maternal authority. She suggested the very arts, by which a person, venerable for years and piety, might be deceived. And to overcome the reluctance of one, whom she was disposed to serve at the expense of honour and principle, she offered to take the consequences upon herself. A mind, not remarkably fair and generous, would naturally yield to such a seducer. Jacob had before taken the advantage of his brother's wants, and obtained the birth-right; would he not, then, take the advantage of his absence, and secure the blessing?

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PARENTS, who want virtue themselves, are not always indifferent about the virtue of their offspring. Very far from it : they frequently discover an earnest desire that their children may excel, as well in morals, as in other accomplishments. The most sceptical and libertine parent would not choose that one, immediately descended from him, should be an atheist ; that he should hold religion and morality in open contempt ; that he should be a pattern of intemperance, unchastity, and dishonesty ; and that he should fall a victim to his vices. Such a want of natural affection is inconceivable. Hence, it may be observed, that few instances occur, in which parental authority is employed, directly and without disguise, for wicked purposes. There is something in the breast of every one, which revolts at such an abuse.

BUT if one, standing in the relation of a parent, were so disposed, he might become the most fatal of all seducers. The authority vested in him would subdue that opposition, which would be unconquerable by others. And the partiality felt by a child towards the instrument of his being, would give a favourable complexion even to the blackest crimes. Proposals and persuasions to actions the most unjustifiable, would not be reprobated, as though they had proceeded from a different source. And even a very bad example would lose part of its deformity, when contemplated through the medium of filial affection. Admitting the truth of these observations, it necessarily follows, that a parent without principle is the most formidable enemy, which they can have, who entertain the sentiments of children, and who are inclined to yield that submission, which is inculcated by the laws of God, and dictated by nature.

I PROCEED to a third observation ; namely, that parental

parental authority is no farther binding, than it coincides with the authority of God. Fathers on earth are subordinate to a father in heaven. They cannot command what he forbids ; prohibit what he enjoins ; or grant what he denies. All laws made by them, which contravene his laws, are of themselves void. His will must transcend the will of all created beings. Hence, no authority whatever, whether it be that of a parent, a master, a magistrate, or a sovereign, can demand obedience, unless it be limited by the authority of God, as explained in his word, or exercised in his providence. Hence the peculiar style, in which filial obedience is recommended in the gospel : " Children, obey your parents in the Lord ;" that is, as far as their will is conformable to that of their Lord. If a father on earth were to command idolatry, falsehood, dishonesty, revenge, or any known immorality ; if he were to dispense with one of the least of our Saviour's commandments ; if he were to enjoin that, concerning which scruples would arise in the bosom of a serious Christian, disobedience, in such instance, would be a virtue.—When we cannot obey both, whether we ought to submit to God or man, is a point which may easily be determined.

In the infancy of the gospel, it is highly probable, such cases frequently occurred. Many believing children had unbelieving parents ; and this might create, in their bosoms, a struggle between their duty to them, and their duty to the Saviour. There can be no doubt, that parental authority would, in these circumstances, be exerted in opposition to the cause of truth. But, it was to be of no avail, when it aimed at the overthrow of Christianity, or contemplated the apostasy of those, who professed themselves

selves Christians. A child was to continue in the faith, and to persevere in the profession and practice of the gospel, though he not only wanted the concurrence of a parent, but acted in direct opposition to his will. In a concern of such importance, obedience to God was to transcend all other considerations.

If Jacob had entertained this profound respect to God, and his duty, he would have been armed against that temptation, which proved so injurious to his character, and so fatal to his happiness. He would have alleged the immutable obligations of truth and justice. The rights of a brother, he would have resolutely maintained. He would also have insisted on the wickedness of all impositions; those, more especially, which are practised on a parent. To the insinuations of a mother, he would have opposed the authority of God. How can I do this great wickedness, and incur the displeasure of heaven, would have been his language, when tempted to secure the blessing at the expense of filial piety and common justice. These objections to an immoral action, would have done honour to his religious, without reflecting disgrace on his filial character.

FOURTHLY—I am led to remark, that the dreadful imprecation, “upon me be thy curse, my son,” will be executed upon all, who, by their evil counsel, their bad example, or their neglect, have contributed to the ruin of their offspring. Young minds may be corrupted, both by what they hear, and what they see. Evil actions may be recommended in direct terms. But there is something so unnatural, so shocking, in counsels avowedly in favour of immoral practices, that it is scarcely conceivable how the lips of a parent could utter them. Persons must be de-
praved

proved to the last degree, before they can bring their minds to act so inhuman a part. If, however, the age in which we live, or the community of which we are members, furnish any such example, the imprecation before us will, in that case, be verified. A curse will attend the unnatural seducer. Probably in this world, but certainly in the world to come, he will eat of the fruit of his own ways; and be filled with his own devices.

A CURSE will also be upon those, who corrupt the morals of their children by an evil example. Would to God, that such an example were as uncommon, as direct lessons in favour of immorality. Few are so hardened, as, in positive terms, to preach wickedness: but many are so uncircumspect, have so little reverence for God, so little respect for religion, as, by their actions, to put a sanction on vice. The parent, however, who, before the eyes of his household, exhibits a bad example, is a real tempter; and may expect the punishment threatened to those, who cause the simple to err; and who promote the cause of wickedness in the world. A levity of speech, whenever the subject of religion is introduced; profaneness and indecency in common conversation; falsehood and slander; open injustice; gross intemperance, and libertine practices, may be regarded as the most effectual lessons of vice; and will admit of this comment, "go, and do likewise." This, I am sensible, may not be intended: but this may be rationally expected, when vice has the sanction, if not of a parent's voice, yet of his actions. Rendered familiar, it will first be endured, then approved, and finally practised.

If, therefore, any have conducted in such a manner, as to seduce those, whom they ought to have
formed

formed to piety and virtue, they may be assured, that the moral governor of the world will inflict on them a punishment adequate to their crimes. If immortal honour awaits those, who have converted a sinner from the error of his ways, what disgrace will overwhelm such as, if not by their evil counsels, yet by their evil example, have recommended iniquity, and corrupted good manners? Must not every victim to immorality be a witness against them? And must it not embitter their future state to reflect, that the nearest of all earthly objects, those who claimed their first attention, and their warmest affections, learned from them to insult God, to despise religion, to indulge the worst passions, and to contract the worst habits?

FURTHER—The imprecation in the text will be on those, who ruin their children, or any, whom heaven has committed to their guardianship, by neglect. Many, whose counsels are good, and whose example is favourable to virtue, are deficient in that watchfulness, which becomes the character, and the station of a parent. They prescribe good rules, but do not see them carried into execution. They set an amiable example, but do not examine into its moral effects. In plain language, they do not inquire what manner of persons they are, on whom their instructions have been bestowed; do not concern themselves to know what virtues they have acquired, or what habits they have contracted; do not ascertain the important point, whether commendation is to be given, or restraints imposed. Negligent in an article of such moment, they are partners in the guilt, and will be partakers of the disgrace of those, who become vicious through their neglect.

IN confirmation of this, we may appeal to the declaration

claration of God himself, respecting an ancient priest. It was his misfortune to have children, who disgraced themselves, their parent, and religion, by the most immoral practices. Their crimes were of such a magnitude, and the commission of them so public, that a complaint was at length brought to Eli against his sons. Considering the enormity of their conduct, it might have been expected, that they would have been removed from an office, which they had disgraced; and that the zeal of a religious minister would have overcome the affection of the parent. But so far from it, he only said, "why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons, for it is not a good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress." A reproof, so inadequate to the occasion, excited the utmost displeasure of God. Accordingly, Samuel was commissioned to address the too indulgent parent in the following strain: "I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, that I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." The dreadful sentence, contained in these words, was not revoked. The sons were punished for their uncommon wickedness; and the father lived to hear of the judgments, which were executed on them. Both the language, and the measures pursued, in this instance, by the righteous governor of the world, shew, that, if evil counsels will bring down a curse, neglect will not be excused.

AN impartial application of this subject concerns all, who stand in the relation of parents; and is indispensable

dispensable in regard to those, who have publicly engaged to be moral instructors and examples to their offspring. They who have bound themselves, by a solemn promise, to give them a religious education, and to go before them in the path of christian duty, may expect a blessing, if they have kept their promise ; if they have neglected it, a curse. I do not suppose, that any parent, in this assembly, is capable of being a tempter, in the more criminal sense of the word. I would persuade myself, that, in circumstances like those in the text, the counsel there given, and the curse there imprecated, would be rejected with horror by every one present. Still, if there be no instances of parental seduction, are there no instances of parental imprudence or neglect ? Have the plainer duties of Christianity been seasonably inculcated ? Has a good example been constantly displayed ? Has the utmost circumspection been observed ? Has vice been discouraged, by a faithful representation of its present and future consequences ? Has every prudent and rational measure been employed, to guard the young mind from the contagion of moral evil, and to produce the earliest fruits of piety and virtue.

If the station of a parent be honourable ; if the character be sacred ; the duties resulting from it are of infinite importance. Suffer me, then, to exhort those, who come under this description, to give earnest heed to the subject of this discourse. I need not caution you against teaching immorality by precept : I will suppose such a thing impossible. But beware, lest your conversation, more especially where religion is the subject, beware, lest your conduct, in any respect, should betray others into licentious principles and actions. " Let your light so shine before your

your children, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father in heaven." The present is a season, which calls for uncommon vigilance, and circumspection. Be watchful, therefore, and, in those who look up to you for direction, strengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die. So will you not merely avert the evil imprecated in the text : but those, who have been favoured with your instruction, and formed by your example, will rise up and call you blessed.

Sermon XXXI.

Origin of Evil.

ECCLESIASTES VII. 29.

"LO, THIS ONLY HAVE I FOUND, THAT GOD HATH MADE MAN UPRIGHT ; BUT THEY HAVE SOUGHT OUT MANY INVENTIONS.

SOLOMON was a very serious inquirer after truth. God had given him an excellent understanding ; and had placed him in a situation highly favourable for its improvement. But, notwithstanding his superior abilities and advantages, there were many things, which he could not comprehend. The mystery, however, which most confounded his understanding, was the introduction of sin and misery into this world. Under the government of a most wise, powerful, and benevolent being, it was astonishing

ishing to him, that so many disorders should prevail. And considering man as the workmanship of God, he could not easily account for his depravity.

BUT Solomon is not the only person, who has found himself bewildered with this speculation. The wiser heathens, the inquisitive Jews, and Christians of all ages, have considered the great question, "*whence came evil?*" and have confessed their inability to give a satisfactory answer. Of one thing, however, we may be certain, that, as to moral evil, God cannot be its author. If men are sinners, they were not made such by his positive agency. God did not infuse into them an evil principle; or set before them motives to sin, which they could not resist. This is a certain point: and in this, the wise man was fully established. "*Lo, (says he) this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*" As if he had said, I have long attended to human nature, and critically observed the actions of mankind. And the result of all my inquiries is this, that man is the author of his own misery. As to God, he hath done all things well. He is righteous in all his ways; and holy in all his works. And in man, the noblest of his productions, his wisdom and goodness are eminently displayed. He has given him an understanding, that he may discern what is right; a will to choose; and a conscience to direct. As the immediate workmanship of God, man is upright. But, you will remember, that man is a moral agent, and therefore may abuse his liberty. And this is the real, though a melancholy truth. Instead of following the dictates of conscience, he has sought out many inventions. By various arts, he has endeavoured to explain away his duty, or reconcile himself to an unlawful course of living.

living. He has raised scruples and doubts respecting right and wrong. He has wilfully mistaken his own character ; turned away his eyes from the true character and moral government of God ; and refused to observe the nature, or to trace the consequences of his actions. Thus unfriendly to himself, God has left him to take his own course. For it would be a reflection on his infinite wisdom, first to create a moral agent, and then to deprive him of his liberty.

IN this comment, I imagine, we have the true sense of the wise man. But his words deserve a more particular examination. They contain a vindication of the character of God ; and they ascribe the vices and follies of mankind to their true cause. As each of these subjects is highly interesting to us, I promise myself your serious attention, whilst I attempt their discussion.

FIRST—We learn from the text, that “*God made man upright.*” These words are certainly true, if we refer them to the first parent of the human race. By Christians, of all denominations, it is acknowledged, that, as he came from the hands of his maker, Adam was an innocent being. The mosaic account of the creation evidently suggests this idea. Having formed the various inferior animals, which inhabit the earth, the ocean, and the air, God said, let us make man in our image, and our likeness. And we are expressly informed, that man was so created.

IN this short account, I am sensible, some include more than others. From the words of Moses, some infer, that Adam resembled his maker in knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and an unlimited dominion over the lower creation. Others maintain, that he received from God only a capacity for making these attainments. According to the former, he was actually

tually holy, righteous, and wise: according to the latter, he was capable of becoming so. I need not mention the several arguments, by which these different opinions are supported. It is sufficient to say, that upon either principle, the first man was upright. There was nothing faulty in his nature. There was no bias towards moral evil. Every thing was right in the parent of the human race, when, having breathed into him the breath of life, the inspiration of the Almighty gave him understanding. Accordingly, the account of the creation closes with these words, "and God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

BUT, as God made our first parent upright, so I may venture to say, that he has not, by his positive agency, infused an evil principle into his posterity. As the production of infinite wisdom and goodness, we are upright. Otherwise, we could not, with any colour of reason, be blamed for our transgressions. Were wickedness the fault of our nature, and not of our will, we should have a sufficient excuse for every enormity. Before the tribunal of God and man, we might plead nature and necessity. And this plea would be an ample justification.

BUT how contrary is this to our own internal perceptions? And how directly opposed to the word of God? In the sacred scriptures, the wicked are always represented as their own destroyers. And their sins are invariably ascribed to themselves, and not to him that made them. But what could be more inconsistent than this representation, if we are so formed, by the author of our being, that we cannot but transgress? If we received our nature from God, and we act conformably to that nature, when we do wrong, we are reduced to one or the other of these

these conclusions ; either that there is no moral evil in the world ; or that God is its proper cause. But I am sure, that those, whom I now address, will neither deny a plain fact, nor criminate their maker.

THERE is a sense, then, in which the words before us, will apply to the human kind. But before you either admit or reject this application, let me explain my meaning. When I affirm, that God hath made man upright, I do not mean that his uprightness is like that, which has been ascribed to Adam in his primitive state. I do not mean that it is the uprightness of angels : or that it will admit of any comparison with the rectitude of the son of God. The uprightness, of which I am speaking, is that which is compatible with a frail, mortal, and fallible nature. In the scale of being, man undoubtedly holds a very inferior place. It has been thought, that he is the lowest of all moral agents. Hence his frequent deviations from the rule of right. And hence the unhappy influence of those temptations, which continually beset him. So powerful is the law in his members, and so weak that of his mind, that he is continually acting against his better judgment. Still, however, his will is in fault, and not his nature. God does not expect from him the uprightness of angels. But he requires a degree of holiness, answerable to the powers and faculties, which he has given him.

THE words of an ingenious commentator on this subject, will set this point in a clear and convincing light. “ The uprightness, which belongs to man, “ and which is necessary to discharge God from his “ sins, consists in this, that, notwithstanding the weak- “ ness and infirmity of our nature, and, notwith- “ standing all the consequences of the fall, and not- “ withstanding

“withstanding all our temptations, and proneness to
“sin, yet no man is under a necessity of being wick-
“ed. No man can say, that it is the fault of God’s
“creation ; no, not even of the frail nature, which
“he receives from Adam ; but the unreasonable
“choice of his own will, which makes him live vi-
“ciously. That we are liable to temptation, is the
“weak condition of our nature, and the unhappi-
“ness of our present state. But temptation is not
“sin : and being tempted is not inconsistent with
“uprightness ; that is, not inconsistent with such
“uprightness as God expects from us in this frail
“and imperfect state.” It is added, “God has given
“us eyes to discern the light, understanding to dis-
“tinguish between good and evil, and a will, where-
“by we are enabled to choose the one, and refuse
“the other. And in the truth, or reality of these
“faculties, not in the perfection of them, that is, not
“in their being such as *cannot* be imposed upon, or
“deceived, but in their being such as do not neces-
“sarily deceive us, consists the uprightness, where-
“with the posterity of Adam now come into the
“world.”

AND this is the discovery, which rewarded the
inquiries of the wise man, and reconciled him to the
course of things in this world. He clearly saw, that
every thing was not right. Wherever he turned his
eyes, he beheld vice and misery. And the difficulty
was, how to account for such disorders. At length,
he came to this conclusion, that the fault was not in
God, but in man. The former, he was well convin-
ced, wished the perfection and happiness of his crea-
tures. But the latter, being a free agent, could hear
or forbear, refuse or comply. Unhappily, his will
did not always comport with that of his maker :
and

and hence the train of evils, which imbittered his present condition. To the wise moralist, this was a very important discovery. It gave relief to his mind. And it confirmed those sentiments of respect, which the character and government of God ought always to excite.

BUT if it be an undeniable truth, that "God hath made man upright," I proceed to observe, secondly, "that he hath sought out many inventions." Instead of preserving his original rectitude, which he might have done, by a proper attention to himself; he has lost that, which is the glory of human nature, and the only true source of real happiness. Nor is man the only instance of such folly and perverseness. According to the sacred scriptures, an order of beings, far superior to man, disgraced and ruined themselves by their disobedience. Among the creatures of God, there is an exalted class, distinguished by the name of angels. Of these, some became apostates; and they are now suffering the penal consequences of their wickedness. Their history is not related at large in the inspired volume. But, from hints occasionally dropped, we learn, with certainty, that moral evil found its way into the heavenly abodes: and that the aggressors were cast down to hell, there to remain in chains of darkness till the time of judgment. We may, therefore, apply to these superior offenders, the observation in the text: "Lo, this have we found, that God made his angels upright; but some, even of that august order, have sought out many inventions."

BUT, from the apostate angels, I proceed to the first apostates of the human species. It is granted, that Adam was made in the moral image of God. And as a part of our first parent, the mother of mankind

mankind was dignified with the same likeness. But though created upright, they sought out many inventions. The history of their fall is briefly related by Moses. He says, that God placed them in the garden of Eden, where there grew every tree, which is pleasant to the sight, and good for food ; also the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge. Of the fruit of these trees, God permitted them freely to eat ; that only excepted, which grew in the midst of the garden. Concerning that tree, their maker had said, " ye shall not eat of it, neither touch it, lest ye die." But, overcome by the wiles of the serpent, the woman first transgressed the divine command, and, persuaded by her, the man followed her example. Such is the account given by Moses. And to this event, there are frequent allusions in the christian revelation. Thus, writing to the Romans, St. Paul observes, " by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." And admonishing the Corinthians, he uses these words, " I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity, which is in Christ." And in his epistle to Timothy, he remarks, " Adam was not deceived ; but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression."—And, reproving the pharisees, our Saviour himself has an allusion to the agency of satan in this transaction. In case of disobedience, God had said to our first parents, " ye shall die." Satan, on the other hand, had said, ye shall not die. Believing him, rather than their maker, they transgressed, and, by their transgression, brought death into the world, with all its attendant calamities. On this fact, our Saviour grounds the following pointed reproof : " Ye are of your father the devil ; and the lusts of your

your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh of a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." Thus is the mosaic account of the fall confirmed by our Saviour, and his apostles. How far this account is to be understood in its literal sense, or whether any part be allegorical, it is not my present business to inquire. However interpreted, it confirms the remark in the text, "that God made man upright, but that he sought out many inventions."

AND the remark will apply to all succeeding generations. The crimes of mankind multiplied with their numbers. No sooner was the earth filled with inhabitants, than it was filled with violence. And so enormously wicked were the human species at a certain period, that God destroyed them from the face of the globe. One family only was miraculously preserved, in order that the race of man might not be extinct. And since the flood, there have been times of great depravity. Particular nations have been cut off, as unfit to live. Others have been punished with war, pestilence, famine, or captivity. The vengeance executed on devoted nations, is a proof that their crimes were enormous; and that it was necessary that they should be held up as examples to mankind.

AND there are many instances of impiety and wilful disobedience at the present day. How many persons are there, "who walk in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened, and being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance which is in them"? How many are there, who have "given themselves over to lasciviousness,

iousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" ? How many are there, who are filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, deceit, pride, and other evil affections ? In short, how many persons can we find, in the great mass of society, who are open despisers of God and religion, and who always do that, which is right in their own eyes ? Notwithstanding the rational and moral nature of man ; notwithstanding the means of information, with which he is indulged ; notwithstanding the arguments, addressed to his understanding, and the admonitions, urged on his conscience ; yet examples of such depravity abound in the world. The most enlightened age, and the purest state of society, are not without the leaven of wickedness.

BUT the reason is justly assigned in the text. "Man, though formed upright, hath sought out many inventions." By a wilful abuse of his powers, he has depraved himself. He has chosen to follow the devices of his own mind, rather than the dictates of his reason and conscience. He has chosen the gratifications of sense, in preference to the joys of religion. He has chosen to have his portion in this world, rather than in that which is to come. In all these instances, he has acted voluntarily. No violence has been offered to his inclinations. Nor have any temptations assailed him, which he was not able to resist. For it is a rule in the divine government, that no one should be tempted above that which he is able to bear ; but that, with every temptation, he should be furnished with the means of escape. However great, then, the number, or aggravated the nature of any man's vices, he has no one to blame but himself. They are the objects of his own choice, and the fruits of his own invention. THE

From the subject of this discourse, we learn the impiety of charging God with our transgressions, and the reason we have to reproach ourselves for every act of disobedience. It is certain, that he cannot be tempted with evil, and that he tempteth no man. It is certain, that he made man upright, and that he formed him for virtue and happiness. It is likewise certain, that he has given him the best instructions; set before him the best examples; and presented the best motives. Christians, at least, will not deny, that such are their privileges and advantages. How deeply, then, ought they to be humbled, when they consider their wicked inventions? How great should be their confusion, how poignant their reflections, how sincere their contrition, when they review the foolish and criminal actions, of which they have been guilty? They cannot plead that God has made them sinners. They cannot charge their faults upon the nature, which he has given them, or the situation, in which they are placed by his divine providence.—After searching in vain for objects, on which they may reflect the blame, they are brought home to themselves; and referred to their own hearts, as the proper source of their unrighteousness.

BEING, therefore, the authors of our own depravity, let us humble ourselves before God, and implore his pardoning mercy through Jesus Christ. Let us sincerely repent of every false and wicked way; and as sincerely let us endeavour to amend them. Let us no longer study excuses for a course of behaviour, which is at once affrontive to God, and subversive of all rational enjoyment. But let us own, that we have acted a foolish and wicked part; but hope, through the grace of God, to offend no more.—Finally, let us repair to the author of our being,
Y y
intreating

intreating him to work in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Let it be our daily prayer, that he would lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. And let us never forget those words, which, though addressed to Cain, are an admonition to us all: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door."

Sermon XXXII.

Nature of bad Habits.

2 TIMOTHY, III. 13.

"BUT EVIL MEN—SHALL WAX WORSE AND WORSE."

WE can turn our eyes to no part of scripture, without meeting with some weighty argument in favour of our duty, and some powerful motive to forsake our sins. Sometimes we are told of the exceeding evil of a disobedient life, and the disgrace it brings upon a moral intelligent creature. At other times, the judgments of God are set before us. Now we are allured with the hopes of heaven; and now deterred with the positive denunciations of future punishment. And to leave no measure untried, "evil men are assured, that so far from being recovered in their last moments, they will, in all probability, grow worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." This is the testimony of St. Paul in the text; and to this I would now ask your attention.

FIRST

FIRST—The apostle asserts, that "*evil men wax worse and worse.*" By evil men, we are here to understand, open and notorious transgressors. Persons, who have made but small progress in vice, may be recovered. By the ordinary means of grace, they often are brought to a proper sense of things. And being humbled and reformed, they become some of the brightest ornaments of Christianity. But this is seldom the case with those, who have been long accustomed to do evil. The longer they live, the more hardened they become. And though, in their last moments, they sometimes appear to have a serious concern respecting their future condition, yet we have no reason to believe that any saving change takes place. It amounts to the highest moral certainty, that, as in life, so in death, they are enormously guilty in the sight of God. They are, as it is very properly expressed in scripture, "*driven away in their wickedness.*" And though we have no right to determine in what manner, or to what degree they will suffer hereafter, yet we must suppose, that their guilt will be a source of inexpressible misery.

As for those, who have never sold themselves to work iniquity, it is easily conceivable that they should awake to serious reflection, should remember from whence they have fallen, should repent, and do their first works. Their habits are not fixed. Their moral sense is not wholly extinguished. They have some feeling; and they are still capable both of shame and remorse. Hence we are not surprised, that, after his disgraceful fall, Peter should become a true penitent, and a good man. When we hear David lamenting his misconduct, and resolving to repair his errors, we do not hear any thing unnatural or unexpected.

unexpected. It may always be presumed, that men, who accidentally fall, will rise again.

BUT it is unreasonable, to the last degree, to expect that such as have grown old in sin, should, just at the close of life, become new creatures. It is contrary to the established course of things. It is contrary to actual observation. Look at those, who through life have worked wickedness, and you will find, that religion is as great a burden to them when old, as when in the midst of their days. If possible, they are less disposed than ever, to converse with God, with their own souls, or with that volume, which contains their duty, and reveals to them a future state. Being estranged from God by wicked works, they do not feel any real inclination to begin an acquaintance. It is a burden to reflect. For which reason, we cannot, in general, draw a more favourable conclusion, than that they have gone down to the grave with all their guilt upon their heads.

By evil men, understanding, therefore, those who have been long accustomed to do evil, we may say, that they wax worse and worse. The longer God spares their lives, the more guilt they contract. If lying be the vice, to which they have been longest addicted, they will grow worse, in this respect, in proportion as they have more opportunities for violating the truth. If practised in any dishonest arts, they will grow more knavish as they grow old. If habitually intemperate now, as they have time, opportunity, and the means, they will plunge still deeper in this most infamous of all vices. If profaneness and infidelity be the sins, which now most easily beset them, the presumption is, that they will become still more impious; will take still greater liberties

erties with God; and will become more inveterate against the religion of his son. Both virtue and vice are progressive. The path of the just shines more and more. The longer a good man works righteousness, the more holy and exemplary he becomes. He grows continually in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in a conformity to his temper and gospel, and in a preparation for heaven. So, on the other hand, the longer a bad man works wickedness, the more easy he feels in a course of sin. He grows experienced in works of darkness. He takes delight in the service of satan. And having, at length, subdued conscience, and, in a manner, destroyed the moral principle, the words of the prophet Jeremiah are exactly suited to his case. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots, then may you also do good, who are accustomed to do evil."

It being, then, an undoubted truth, that "*evil men wax worse and worse*," I shall now endeavour to account for the fact. And one reason of their increasing wickedness, is the injury done to natural conscience by their vicious practices. The moral principle may be improved, and it may be impaired. By a course of virtue, conscience will acquire such a tenderness, as to be a most faithful monitor, guide, and judge. By a course of wickedness, it will become so hardened, as to answer no moral purpose whatever. It is well known, that this very important part of our nature may be destroyed. Conscience may become stupid and senseless. However corrupt our practice, it may give us no uneasiness on that account. It may even speak peace to us, when we are in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity. And it may flatter us with the idea of perfect security, when there is but a step between us and ruin.

DEPRIVED,

DEPRIVED, therefore, of the instructions, admonitions, reproofs, and warnings of conscience, how natural is it, that evil men should wax worse and worse? Had Peter been in this state, we never should have heard of his shame, remorse, and repentance. When the Lord turned, and looked on him, he would not have gone out, and wept bitterly. But the conscience of Peter was not scared as with a hot iron. It was still capable of performing its office. And it did perform it, by filling him with an ingenuous sorrow, by reducing him to true repentance, by inspiring him with christian boldness, by forming him to the character of a good man, and a good apostle, and by confirming him in the noble resolution of dying in *his* cause, whom he had once basely denied. Such is the power of conscience, where it retains its moral influence. Where its influence is lost, how deplorable the case? How hazardous *his* situation, who is deprived of this faithful monitor and guide? He works wickedness without any distressing apprehensions, unless it be, when a concurrence of circumstances has roused him to reflection. And, without any fear or concern, he treasures up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

THE injury done to conscience, by wicked practices, is, then, one great cause of the growing iniquity of evil men. They wax worse and worse, because they have no conscience to protest against their wickedness. They have nothing within to accuse and punish them. They have silenced the voice of that divine instructor, to whom heaven had committed the charge of their innocence. Consequently, they feel at liberty to fulfil the desire of the flesh and the mind. And they go on, making themselves
vile,

vile, till the sentence has gone forth, "let him that is filthy, be filthy still."

SECONDLY—Wicked men wax worse and worse, because they have lost a very powerful restraint, arising from a *sense of shame*. This sense has a very considerable influence over such, as are not absolutely hardened. Persons of this description will often pay a very great regard to outward appearances. They will abstain from many enormities, merely because they would feel ashamed, should their wickedness happen to be detected. They imagine they should not dare to look mankind in the face, that they must fly from all human society, that they must bury themselves in some dreary solitude, should they yield to the wicked desires which spring up in the mind. Under this impression, they abstain from many wilful transgressions. And if, at any time, they are drawn away, and enticed, they are easily recovered, by means of the disagreeable sensations excited in them. But the sinners referred to, in the text, are incapable of these feelings. They have become indifferent to the opinions of the world: they have no regard to appearances. For which reason, they act according to their corrupt inclinations, in defiance of God, and in defiance of mankind.

THIRDLY—Wicked men wax worse and worse, because of their utter indisposition to attend to those means, which have a tendency to recover them from sin, and restore them to their duty. The frequent, and careful perusal of the holy scriptures, is one very powerful mean of grace. The instructions, admonitions, promises, and threatenings of the new-testament, are admirably suited to turn men from sin to holiness. The psalmist well observes, "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testi-
mony

mony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." And again, "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way." In this language, David describes the Jewish scriptures. But had he been acquainted with the christian revelation, he might have said more. The gospel of Christ has certainly many advantages compared with the law of Moses. It contains better rules of conduct. Its doctrines are more interesting and sublime. And its sanctions are far more solemn and affecting. Hence it is able to build us up, and give us an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

THE scriptures, then, are an invaluable treasure. And he, who consults them with a proper temper, will be furnished to every good word and work.— But all these advantages are lost upon evil men: for they never recur to those scriptures, either for entertainment or instruction. The oracles of God are to them a sealed book. They consult them on no occasion, unless for the profane purpose of turning them into ridicule. Did they read their bibles, they might possibly be impressed with their guilt and danger. They might see themselves, and be induced to flee from the wrath to come. They might be dazzled with the light and glory of the heavenly world: might be attracted by the honours, which await the
righteous;

righteous ; and by the various arguments, urged by the gospel, might be persuaded to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Such advantages might they reap from the volume of revelation, if they ever had recourse to it. But being strangers to this sacred study, they are strangers to these effects. Because they do not admit the seed into their hearts, they continue unfruitful. In short, the word, however excellent in itself, and in its tendency, does not profit evil men, because there is no opportunity for it to produce its proper effects, either upon their tempers or morals. So far, therefore, from being an essential benefit to such persons, the word will eventually be the means of increasing both their guilt, and their punishment.

BUT the study of the holy scriptures is not the only means, which evil men neglect. They also neglect an attendance on public worship, and the instructions dispensed in the house of God ; and this is another reason why they wax worse and worse. It cannot be denied, that the public institutions of religion have a most admirable tendency. There is far more piety in the world, far more justice, more benevolence, and more virtue of every kind, than if no such institutions had taken place. No man of common understanding will pretend, that society is not greatly indebted to them. We, my hearers, in this country, should never have been so civilized, so enlightened, so free, so happy, as we now are, had not our fathers brought their religion with them, and had not the public offices of devotion been esteemed an essential part of that religion. In places where God is not worshipped, nor the gospel preached, there is generally a great prostration of all principle. Darkness and vice overspread such places ;

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and the longer they continue destitute of public instruction, the more depraved they become.

It must, then, be admitted, that the assembling of ourselves together, in order to worship God, to hear his word, to sing his praise, and to attend to the word preached, has a most direct tendency to check the progress of vice, and to promote the cause of virtue. But no such advantages are derived from hence by evil men, because they will not make a proper use of the means. In the public prayers addressed to the Deity, they are not present to bear their part. The word is read, but they are not in the way of hearing that word. And as to the moral and practical truths, which are dispensed every Lord's day, they do not immediately profit evil men, because persons of this character are otherwise employed, than in listening to a religious discourse. Could they be persuaded to attend divine service, they might possibly hear something, which would make them afraid, or ashamed of their vices. They might be convinced of the exceeding evil of sin, of the charms of virtue, of the pleasures of religion; they might be led to see their true interest in forsaking the error of their way, and returning to a course of duty. Have they doubts respecting the divine authority of the gospel? those doubts might in this case possibly be removed. Have they said in their heart, there is no God? who can say but a conviction of his being, perfections, and providence, may be the happy consequence of their attendance in his courts? Have they entertained any doubts respecting a future state? may they not receive satisfaction from the arguments sometimes offered upon this head? Have they been accustomed to think lightly of their duty? is it not credible, that a steady attendance on a course of preaching may

may correct this mistake? I presume it is not ascribing too much to the public ministration of the word, to insist, that, if duly attended to, it would turn the wicked man from his wickedness; and dispose him to do that, which is lawful and right.

How natural, then, the increasing wickedness of evil men, when, among others, they neglect this very powerful mean of becoming wiser and better? They forget that there is a God, because they do not suffer themselves to be reminded of him. They forget their duty, because they do not hear it statedly inculcated upon their minds. They do not realize that they are accountable creatures, that they must soon die, that there is a day of judgment, and a state of retribution, because they are never in the way of hearing these truths stated and defended. Hence they wax worse and worse; their vicious habits become more inveterate; and they removed to a still greater distance from God and happiness.

Thus have I endeavoured to account for the very alarming fact, mentioned in the text. Evil men become more evil, because their hearts are hardened, and their consciences stupified; because they have lost all shame; because they neglect the means of grace, and because they allow themselves no time to consider the nature and consequences of their actions. Thus inclined to evil, God suffers them to make themselves vile. My spirit, he is ready to say, shall not always strive with such transgressors. "Inasmuch as ye have hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; as ye would none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore, shall ye eat of the fruit of your own way; and be filled with your own devices."

From this view of things, how thankful ought those

those to be, who have never abandoned themselves to a vicious course of living. How unfeignedly ought they to bless God for the restraints of his grace. In many things, perhaps, they have offended; and in all they have fallen short. Still, however, they have never wholly lost sight of their duty; nor come to the serious determination to throw off all restraint, and give themselves up to that infernal spirit, that worketh in the children of disobedience. They have never said in their heart, there is no God. Or, owning his existence, they have never insulted him in the following terms: Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Thus graciously preserved from the great transgression, they ought to bless God for his goodness. It ought to be a part of their daily prayer, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. And, without ceasing, they should ask of God to keep them by his mighty power, through faith, unto salvation.

SECONDLY—From the text we learn how falsely they argue, who pretend, that the worse a man is, the greater his prospect of being made a subject of that conversion, which is represented in scripture, as the great qualification for the kingdom of heaven. It has been openly maintained, that persons, who have some good qualities, are farther from heaven, than those, who are enormously bad. And were two persons going to execution, the one dissolved in tears, the other blaspheming God, and deriding his fate, it has been asserted, that a work of grace would more probably be wrought on the latter, than the former. How these assertions can be reconciled with scripture, is absolutely inconceivable. Had they any foundation, it would be proper to exhort habitual transgressors to wax worse and worse. The preacher should

should assure the more profligate part of his charge, that it was for their interest to persevere : that the heavier their load of guilt, the sooner they would find relief : the deeper their moral stain, the sooner it would be washed out. And this would be as consistent, as if a prodigal was exhorted to waste all his substance, in order to grow rich ; or the intemperate man to indulge still more, in order to recover his health.

THE less we any of us have departed from the line of duty, the easier it will be to break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by turning to God. Every step we take downward, renders our return more arduous. Wherefore, let us not venture into the path of vice, presuming that we may at any time retreat. Let us instantly forsake that dangerous path, for it is the way to hell. Let us avoid it, turn from it, and pass away. Let us implore the pardoning mercy of God, on account of the guilt already contracted. And whilst thankful that we have made ourselves no worse, let us pray God to make us better. Let us watch and pray, that we fall not into temptation. And having our duty, and our danger continually in view, instead of waxing worse and worse, our path will shine more and more unto the perfect day.

Sermon XXXIII.

On Regeneration.

1 PETER, I. 23.

“BEING BORN AGAIN, NOT OF CORRUPTIBLE SEED,
BUT OF INCORRUPTIBLE, BY THE WORD OF GOD,
WHICH LIVETH AND ABIDETH FOREVER.”

WHEN our blessed Saviour was on earth, he received a visit, as you may recollect, from an eminent ruler of the Jews. During that visit, and in the course of conversation, which then passed, our Lord advanced the following sentiment: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Astonished at such a doctrine, the ruler inquired, “how can a man be born when he is old; can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” The Saviour replied, “except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit, is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again.” This explanation did not, however, satisfy the inquirer; he was still prompted to ask, “how can these things be?” He did not perceive, that our Saviour was speaking merely of a moral change; and of the necessity of a change, in order to be capable of celestial happiness. His dulness of apprehension, and his backwardness to believe, are, therefore, reproved in the following terms: “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”

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THIS reproof might, with equal justice, be applied to ourselves, if ignorant of the nature, of the author, and of the necessity of that moral change, which was first taught by our divine Lord, and afterwards inculcated by the apostles. It is true, the subject has sometimes been treated in a very mysterious manner. And many serious minds have been perplexed and bewildered, by the numerous comments, which have been made on the terms, used by the sacred writers, to express a change from vice to virtue, and the substitution of good habits and principles for bad ones. But, however it might appear to the Jewish ruler, to us, the subject is not necessarily obscure. It so often occurs in the christian writings, that we, who have access to those writings, may, if we will give ourselves the trouble to inquire, easily ascertain what is to be understood by *being born again*. Out of many passages, in which the doctrine is contained, I have made choice of the following: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." It shall be my endeavour to illustrate the several truths expressed in these words.

FIRST—The apostle addresses those, for whose instruction and consolation his epistle was more immediately intended, as *being born again*. He had before observed, that they had been redeemed from their vain conversation, received by tradition from their fathers. He had also commended their faith in God, who raised up Christ from the dead; and had acknowledged its efficacy, in purifying their souls. In the text, he speaks of them as "*born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible." Comparing all these terms, it appears, that these persons had, by means of the gospel, been recovered from

from a state of ignorance and wickedness, and had been formed to the temper and character of true Christians. They had been converted from infidelity to the belief, and from a course of immorality to a life of religion. To use the language of inspiration, they "had put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the lusts of deceit; and had put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness, and true holiness." Morally speaking, they had become *new creatures*. All these expressions are familiar to those, who are conversant with the sacred writings. They imply a thorough reformation, both of heart and life.

THE change, however, or second birth, mentioned in the text, will be best understood by attending to its effects. Let it, then, be carefully observed, that they, who are born again, will be essentially improved, both in their temper of mind, and their external behaviour. They will demonstrate the divine operation on their hearts by a spirit of fervent piety, by a supreme love to God, by the warmest gratitude to Christ, by meekness, forbearance, humility, and benevolence, by the same mind which actuated the son of God, and which is the temper of his religion.—When born again, he, who was once impious, will be devout; he, who once lived without God in the world, will be deeply impressed with the perfections of his nature; he, who seldom reflected on his maker, will think of him with delight; he, who felt a cold indifference towards the Saviour, will be inspired with unfeigned love; he, who once experienced the malignant influence of envy, jealousy, pride, and self-love, will be delivered from these hateful passions; he, who was once a slave to fleshly

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lusts, which war against the soul, will gain a victory over them; he, who was once conformed, in his opinions and principles, to this world, will be transformed by the renewing of his mind, and will become a partaker of the divine nature. Unless the heart be thus purified, and its affections be regulated in the manner which I have described, there has not been any change answerable to the terms employed in the text. He, who retains his old habits and passions, is fatally deceived, if he imagine that he is born of water, and of the spirit. The new creation necessarily implies a heart right with God, and the peculiar temper of the gospel.

FURTHER—The effects of this important change may be traced in the life and actions of those, who are, not in imagination, but in reality, subjects of it. If the heart be purified, the life will be reformed. He, who, in a spiritual sense, is “risen with Christ, will seek those things which are above.” Being turned from darkness to light, he will be recovered from the slavery of satan to the service of God. Being liberated from evil passions, he will have his fruit unto holiness. His affections being set right, he will cease to do evil, and will earnestly endeavour to do well. His obedience will be uniform, because inclination will concur with conscience in enforcing a strict observance of all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. To God, he will consecrate all his powers; to him, he will render his unfeigned homage: in him, he will confide; and before him, he will walk in righteousness, and true holiness, all his days. To the saviour, he will also yield that submission, which is due to one, whom the father has sanctified, and sent into the world to bless mankind, by turning them from their iniquities. He will rev-

erence his authority, and follow his example. Towards his fellow-men, he will conduct in such a manner, as to verify his professions of justice, mercy, and truth. Nor will he be less attentive to those duties, which more immediately concern himself, and which are of a private nature. He will, from principle, keep himself unspotted of the world. Thus will he, who is born again, show that he has been created anew, by a temper worthy of the gospel, and by a life of the most exalted piety and virtue. Agreeable to this, is the testimony of John : " Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him ; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

HAVING described the second birth, by referring to its effects, I proceed, in the next place, to ascertain its cause. And, according to the apostle, " we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, that is, by the word of God." By the word, to which such efficacy is ascribed, St. Peter means the gospel, of which he was a successful preacher. It is styled incorruptible seed, because its design and tendency are, to render us immortal. As descending from mortal parents, we are born to die. Our destination, in this view, is illustrated by that of the grass, and the flowers. Hence the text is immediately followed by this pertinent remark : " For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass ; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." Thus does our first birth subject us to mortality, in common with the various members of the vegetable kingdom.

BUT our second birth, by means of the gospel, will be attended with very different consequences. If born again, we shall be raised to a glorious and blessed

fed immortality, at the second coming of our redeemer. We shall then hear his voice, and come forth ; and awaking in his likeness, we shall be like the holy angels, on whom death has no power. The moral change, produced by the gospel, will be followed by such a natural change, that whatever was once mortal in us, will then be swallowed up of life. Thus will our corruptible put on incorruption ; and thus will this temporary frame be exchanged for a " building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

In this view, the word of the Lord is incorruptible seed ; and that it is effectual to the illumination of the understanding, and the reformation of the heart and life, may be inferred from direct testimony, and from an inspection of the system itself. The efficacy of the word is clearly maintained by its inspired preachers. Writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul says, " in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." In his epistle to the Ephesians, he speaks of the church, as " sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water, by the word." St. James expresses himself in the following terms : " Of his own will, begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." And, in other places, the gospel is represented as " the power of God to salvation ; as able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among those who are sanctified ; as quick and powerful," and adequate to the correction of our errors, and the conquest of our lusts and passions. These representations of the christian revelation confirm the doctrine in the text, that it is the instrument employed, by infinite wisdom, to change the human heart, and render men new creatures.

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AND if we examine the system itself, we shall be convinced of the divine efficacy of the gospel. Its doctrines, if attended to, will pour in light on the mind. They will correct all dangerous mistakes, relative to the character and government of God, his holy will, and benevolent designs; all mistakes relating to our own moral state, the salvation for which our circumstances called, and the Saviour provided. The traditions, received by the Gentiles from their fathers, were a source of the most fatal errors. They tended, at the same time, to darken the understanding, and to deprave the heart. But the gospel, describing the character, and containing the will of God, could not be cordially received as a rule of faith, without irradiating the mind, and producing the most extensive acquaintance with God, and divine things. The doctrines of revelation comprise every thing, which it concerns us to know, in order to the moral perfection of our nature. As far, therefore, as religious information is the privilege and ornament of those, who are born again, so far the change is produced by the gospel.

FURTHER—The word of God is the instrument of our conversion, as it points out the vices, which we must forsake, and the duties, which we must perform; as it corrects our faults, and instructs us in righteousness. There is not any good principle, good habit, or good action, for which the gospel does not furnish either a rule or a motive. It exposes all the follies and infirmities, to which we are liable: and it exhibits a rule of action suited to all persons, ages, and circumstances. Applied to the preceptive part of the gospel, the words of David are literally true: the laws of Christ "are perfect, converting the soul. His testimony is sure, making wise the

the simple. His statutes are right, rejoicing the heart. His commandment is pure, enlightening the eyes." The rules prescribed by Christ, for the reformation of the heart, for the regulation of the affections, and for the government of our lives, are adequate to those great objects. When they have their full effect, they render those, on whom they operate, wise to salvation.

TAKING, then, an impartial view of the gospel; considering the efficacy ascribed to it by its inspired teachers; considering its sublime doctrines, particularly that of a future state of retribution; considering its numerous precepts, and powerful motives; in a word, considering it as a perfect rule of faith and practice, we may justly regard it as the incorruptible seed of the new and divine life. It is not unreasonably magnified in the text, if, by means of it, the man of God may be made perfect, the wicked reclaimed, and the well-disposed be furnished to every good work.

THIRDLY—We learn from the text, that "the word of God liveth, and abideth forever." Some, I am sensible, apply these terms, not to the word, but to God himself. That the supreme being is from everlasting to everlasting, is, indeed, one of the primary truths of religion: but still, I do not find this doctrine in the words before us. They would have been arranged in a different manner, if the apostle had intended, in this place, to predicate immortality of God.

THAT the gospel "liveth and abideth forever," may, perhaps, seem a strange expression; but this language is countenanced by other christian writers. In the revelation, it is termed the "everlasting gospel." In the epistle to the Hebrews, it is said to *live*; and

and in the second to the Corinthians, to remain or abide, without being abolished. Nor is this all : in the very passage, which St. Peter had in view, and which suggested the expression in the text, we find the same doctrine. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth ; but the word of our God shall stand forever." This passage you will find in the prophecy of Isaiah. That the word, which abideth forever, meant the person, not the gospel of our Saviour, has been supposed by some critics : but the context will not admit the supposition. For having repeated the sentiment in the text, "the word of the Lord endureth forever," he adds, "and this is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you." Though Christ be denominated, therefore, the word of God ; and though he is crowned with immortal glory and happiness, still it is his gospel, which, according to the testimony of St. Peter, "liveth and abideth forever." It will continue in force till the second coming of its divine founder. It will not be superseded by any other dispensation ; but will remain in force till the great and benevolent ends of it shall be accomplished. Human opposition will not prevail against it. Having the patronage of heaven, it will triumph in future, as it has triumphed in times past. The violence of man could not exterminate it, even in its infancy. Nor will it be overthrown by any of the arts, which may hereafter be employed against it, by the most inveterate of its enemies. We are assured by its great author, that it stands on a rock. And we may believe that it will abide forever, because it has resisted the most formidable opposition ; and because it has always gained strength by measures which threatened its destruction. The sentiment, therefore, advanced by the apostle, may be
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freely admitted. We need not labour to explain away the literal meaning of his words. The gospel may, with the utmost propriety, be said to live and abide forever, because God *will* not, and man *can* not, subvert that glorious institution.

I HAVE now considered the leading truths contained in the text. It remains to answer some objections, which may be made, if not to the nature and evidence of the new birth, yet to the more immediate cause of it, as represented in this discourse. In the text, we are referred to the word of God, or the gospel, as the incorruptible seed, of which we are born again. It cannot be denied, that, in some other places, we are said to be born of God, born of water, and of the spirit. Thus the evangelist John, having mentioned the sons of God, proceeds thus, "who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." His meaning is, that true Christians became such, not merely by any external right, like that of circumcision; not by natural descent, nor by any influence or agency, merely human; but by the divine power, operating by the gospel. It will be easy to reconcile all those passages, which seem to ascribe the new creation to different causes. When carefully examined, they all speak the same language. We are born of God, because God does really change our hearts, and rectify our behaviour; but he employs the gospel to effect this change. It is the instrument, by which he creates us anew, and implants in us a disposition favourable to our duty. We are also born of the spirit, because the gospel was dictated and confirmed by the spirit; and because the spirit is really God himself, or his influence exerted in the manner which I have described. There is, therefore, no contradiction

tion in these several testimonies from the sacred volume. When St. Peter says, that we are born again by the word of God, which endureth forever, he does not deny the divine agency, but only refers us to the immediate instrument of our regeneration. When St. John says, that we are born of God, he does not mean to exclude the gospel; nor to intimate that we are recovered to our duty, without the intervention of the christian doctrines, precepts, and motives. And when our Saviour asserts, that, to be qualified for heaven, we must be born of water and of the spirit, he does not assert, that we are born by miracle, and that the gospel has no influence in this moral renovation. By no means: when persons are born again, there are no new revelations made to them; but they are born by the word of God, as it was first preached, by men divinely inspired; and as it is now contained in the holy scriptures. And let me observe, this representation, whilst it ascribes the glory of this change to God, by asserting his agency, vindicates the efficacy of the gospel; and shows, that his moral, like his natural government, is exercised conformably to stated laws.

PERSUADED, then, that if we are ever made wise and good, it will be by means of the word of truth, let us inquire, whether these effects have been actually produced. The question is, not what fervours we may have experienced, what raptures we have felt, or at what particular moment we imagine that our conversion took place; but what has been our prevailing temper, what the general tenour of our actions. Has the gospel cured us of an inordinate love of the world? Has it cured us of envy, malice, pride, a disposition to condemn, or injure those, who differ in opinion from us? Has it cured us of sensual passions,

passions, of dishonesty, insincerity, and every fraudulent practice? Has it rendered us upright in our dealings, circumspect in our conversation, pious in respect to God, and benevolent to men? Has it made us Christians, according to the character drawn in the sacred writings, and according to the exhibition of that character in the first preachers and believers of the gospel? If the gospel, under the direction, and accompanied with the blessing of God, has produced a thorough reformation, both as to principle and practice, we are born again; and, by consequence, may expect to enter into the kingdom of God. The change itself, and not the manner of it, whether momentary or gradual, is all which concerns us. If we have the pure, the amiable, and the benevolent temper of the gospel; if our habits and actions conform to that divine institution, we must be happy in the approaching state.

FAVoured with the word of the Lord, let it be your concern to make it subservient to your highest improvement and future happiness. To this end, let it be consulted, and applied; and let it be studied under this conviction, that it "is perfect, converting the soul." Let it be your earnest petition to the father of lights, that the counsels of his word may illuminate your minds, and govern your whole lives. The author of all good will not reject your petition. He will keep you from falling; and, like his holy word, you will live and abide forever.



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Sermon XXXIV.

On the Desire of Life.

2 KINGS, XX. 3.

—“AND HEZEKIAH WEPT SORE.”

THAT many good Christians should suffer so much from the fear of death, and at last quit the world with such irresolution, has been matter of great surprise to all, who have thought upon it.—Who would not have supposed, that men of this character would meet the king of terrors without dismay? Having long familiarized themselves to the thought of dying, were it not natural to conclude, they would, in their last moments, subscribe to the excellency of religion, by the glorious and triumphant hopes of life and immortality?

BUT observation convinces us, this is very far from being actually the case. We have only to look into the world, and we shall see some of the best characters, “through fear of death, subject to bondage.” And we may behold them go off the stage with a timid reluctance, which would reflect dishonour even upon the guiltiest malefactor.

WHETHER it is the prejudice of education, which operates so forcibly in our dying moments; whether we are terrified with the thought of a winding sheet and a coffin, mourning friends, and the funeral cypress; whether it is the anticipation of that mighty shock, which shall dissolve the long established intimacy between soul and body; or whether it is an approaching

approaching introduction to a new and undiscovered country, from whence no traveller returns; I say, whether it be one, or all these considerations united, that fills us with such gloomy apprehensions, I leave to the decision of a future inquiry. But sure I am of the fact itself; and equally certain, that such want of fortitude, in a good man, is a poor encomium upon the religion he professes. It carries with it a suspicious appearance. It would lead an indifferent person to imagine, that the friendship of religion was like the friendship of the world: that she was full of kind offers, when we wanted nothing of her; but would be sure to desert us, when we stood in most need of her assistance.

SUCH a suspicion, unjust as it is, was fairly the language of the character before us. Hezekiah had long swayed the Jewish sceptre with honour and reputation. He had seen his enemies fall before him; and from the conduct of divine providence toward him and his kingdom, had the utmost reason to think, he was no small favourite with the Lord his God. After a while, however, "Hezekiah was sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah, son of Amos, came to him, and said unto him, thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. *And Hezekiah wept sore.*"

NEVER was the *fear of death* painted in stronger colours, than in the language and behaviour of this monarch. Notwithstanding the approbation of a good conscience, notwithstanding the comfortable hope he might well entertain of a happy existence in
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the heavenly world, still he could not bear the thought of quitting the present. To leave his crown, his kingdom, and all the regal honours behind; and to launch forth into an unknown, untried eternity, he could not reflect upon it without distraction! Accordingly, as became so good a man, he first betook himself to prayer. He spread his case before *him*, who is equally able to "kill and to make alive, to wound, and to heal." He recounted some of those virtues, upon which he could best ground a plea for mercy. He did not forget his integrity, his inviolable regard to truth, and the prevailing innocence of his walk and conversation. And in proof of the ardour and anguish of his soul, he concluded all his petitions with a flood of tears.

STRANGE behaviour this, in such an amiable character, as that of Hezekiah. Had he been some profligate wretch, who had nothing to hope, but every thing to fear from his Lord and judge, no wonder the prospect of death should fill him with such apprehensions. Tribulation and anguish belong to persons of this guilty class. But when we take a view of the life and actions of Hezekiah; when we consider his uprightness, and the general tenour of his moral conduct, we cannot but repeat our surprize, that *he* should ever betray so great a weakness.—Who would not have supposed he would bless the prophet for his joyful prediction? And rather than turn away his face and weep, that he would greet him kindly, as the welcome messenger of the happiest tidings! What, Hezekiah, is the present world a place of such tranquillity and repose? Are its pleasures so superior to the delights of heaven, that you would not wish to make an exchange? Is your felicity so perfect, that you have nothing left to wish or desire?

desire? Is the Jewish crown rather to be chosen than a crown of glory? And is a temporal kingdom preferable to a kingdom that cannot be moved? Can infinite power, under the conduct of unerring wisdom and goodness, devise no method to enhance your felicity? If not, you may well weep at the thought of dying. Under the influence of such persuasions, I know not who could refrain from tears.

BUT if you have so much to plead on the score of merit; if, as you have already asserted, it has been the constant study of your life, to do that which is well pleasing in the sight of God, and can hence promise yourself a crown of glory in the coming world, your fears are not more distressing, than they are groundless and absurd. For shame, man; welcome the moment that shall deliver you from this body of death. Thank God, the time is now at hand, when you will rest from all your labours, in sure and certain hope that your works will follow you. For you cannot be ignorant, that although this "earthly house of your tabernacle be dissolved, you will have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!"

BUT, perhaps, you may still have no occasion for this advice, no call for the exercise of your fortitude. Moved, it may be, by your strong crying and tears, the supreme disposer of all things will reverse your doom. The prophet is hastening back; who knows but he may at once relieve you from all your anxiety. It is surely so; for, as we read in the following verses, "it came to pass, before Isaiah was gone out of the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer,
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I have seen thy tears ; behold, I will heal thee ; on the third day, thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days *fifteen* years."

HAPPY monarch ! we may easily conceive of thy feelings upon this joyful occasion. We may almost see thee bestowing thy caresses upon the prophet. How is thy mourning converted into joy, and into the garment of praise thy heaviness ! How does thy countenance brighten at the recollection of thy narrow escape ! And with what rapture does thy bosom swell at the thought of fifteen long years in this delightful world ! It must surely, Hezekiah, be too good news to be true.

BUT leaving the particular situation of the Jewish monarch, let us employ our present time, by inquiring, first, into the natural reasons, for that weakness, which is so strongly represented in the text. And then,

SECONDLY, point out the best arguments to fortify us against it.

As the critical circumstances of Hezekiah may some time or other be our own, I trust neither you, my hearers, nor I, shall think ourselves uninterested in the inquiry. Yet a little while, and we shall be no more. The dread summons will ere long reach our ears, "*thus saith the Lord, set your house in order ; for ye shall die, and not live.*" Happy for us, in that trying moment, if we can possess our souls in peace. Happy, if we can have such a command over our fears, as to adopt the triumphant language of the apostle : " We are now ready to be offered, and the time of our departure is at hand ; we have fought a good fight, we have finished our course, we have kept the faith ; henceforth there is laid up for us, a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous

teous judge will bestow at that day." How different this from the weak and timid behaviour of Hezekiah? To yield with such divine composure, and to submit with such heroic fortitude, it is conquering death, rather than falling before him. We disappoint him of all his triumphs, when we resign our breath without dismay.

THAT such may be our resolution at that day, when we shall most need it, we shall pursue the inquiry according to the plan proposed. And, first—How comes it to pass, that the prospect of a speedy dissolution strikes us with such peculiar terror?—Upon supposition, death put a final period to our existence, we could not wonder if it had this effect. *To die, to sleep*, without the possibility of ever awaking from our iron slumbers; the thought were sufficient to deprive us of our senses. Could we persuade ourselves, that when death had once made us his prisoners, we should never after regain our liberty, we should have too much reason, with the Jewish prince, *to turn away, and weep sore!* And fifteen years, upon that supposition, were a kind present, by no means to be overlooked.

BUT when we consider what Jesus Christ hath done for a ruined world, how he hath "destroyed him who had the power of death;" how he hath plucked the sting from that merciless tyrant, and foiled the grave of his victory; when we consider how he hath "brought life and immortality to light," and given us a pledge and earnest of our future resurrection; I say, when we take all these truths into consideration, whence that timid reluctance at leaving the world? Can an enemy bound, fettered, and almost entirely disarmed, be still an object of such unmanly fear?

IN answer to which, I would observe, the passion abovementioned is, in some considerable degree, essentially necessary to the present state. Beings, circumstanced as we are, could not otherwise fill the place assigned them. For these reasons, God hath interwoven a principle of *fear* with our very constitution, well knowing, that without it, the great end and design of our creation would be defeated.

1. For, in the first place, did we not regard death with some degree of terror, we should take no pains to provide against those accidents, to which we are hourly exposed. We should fly in the face of danger; and, many times, we should provoke our fate. The falling bridge, the tottering tower, we should pass with a stupid insensibility. And beset, as we are, with dangers and evil of every kind, scarce one in a thousand would live out half his days.

NOR would the more indolent part of mankind exert themselves to prolong life at the expense of so much labour and toil, as are now requisite, in order to that end. They would never rise early, and sit up late; they would never solicit the earth for a scanty subsistence; nor would they vex themselves with the various cares and concerns of life. If they could not live without the continued sweat of the brow, they would even let nature take its course, and recal a gift they did not think worth their acceptance.

BUT now, all this mischief is happily prevented. By implanting, within us, a proper measure of this necessary fear, God hath amply provided for our security. What if the avenues to death are many; caution will not fail, if possible, to stop them. Our fears will ever outstrip our danger. And we shall not think the labour great, nor the toil insupportable,

able, which rewards us with length of days, and the comforts, conveniences, or elegances of life.

2. BUT, secondly, without a principle of fear, men would not only perceive the advances of death with a cold indifference; but they would even hasten them on by violent measures. Upon every little disgust with the world, they would be for putting themselves out of it. If their domestic matters took an unfavourable turn; if, in their ambitious views, they were disappointed, they would not suffer long under the mortification. The first precipice they could find, or the first instrument of death they could meet, would put an instant period to their sorrows. They would never submit to the straits of poverty; they would never languish on the bed of sickness; wearisome nights, and tormenting days, they would never endure. The slave would soon rest from his toil, and the prisoner set himself free. And, if the world did not move on just as we would have it, we should make no scruple of bidding it adieu.

BESIDES all this, there is no species of violence, but would universally take place. The corrupt passions of mankind would rage without control. Suicide and murder would be no singularity. But the whole world would be soon turned into an Aceldama, a field of blood. Such would be the present effects, if the influence of this principle was entirely taken off.

OR the truth of the above, we may readily convince ourselves, by turning to matter of fact. Notwithstanding the predominancy of this fear, yet we find some are hardy enough to perish by their own hands. Mistaken honour, disappointed ambition, cowardice, undeserved reproach, revenge or grief, may drive them to such an unnatural deed. And

in like manner, wrath or malice may prevail with them, to exercise the same violence upon the person of another.

BUT if, under all our present timidity, we can find a disposition to precipitate our own, or the doom of a fellow-creature; if our natural apprehensions of death are not sufficient to engage us to wait "all the days of our appointed time," how much oftener should we act such a rash and inconsiderate part, were those apprehensions less formidable? And if our present fears of an untimely end are not an effectual security against the hand of violence, what havoc, what destruction would ensue, had not those fears been implanted in us? From this view, it is evident, the principle under consideration was wisely ordained. And though Hezekiah had no reason to weep fore, yet, it is certain, a degree of terror was not incompatible with his character or profession.

3. BUT further—That fear of death, which enters so essentially into our constitution, was intended to lead our thoughts toward a future state, and engage us to prepare for it. We all know, how very rarely we should think on the place of our destination, were it not for the dark valley, which conducts to it. Could we be sure, that we should be finally transported to another world, as was the prophet of old, we should give ourselves no further concern about the matter. We should be too apt to say, "soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Let nothing disturb thy mirth, let nothing interrupt thy tranquillity.

BUT now, the case is widely different. The image of death being peculiarly disagreeable, it will be always presenting itself to the mind. It will intrude upon our gayest moments, and throw a gloom over
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all the highest delights of life. In the midst of sensual gratifications, it will steal upon us. It will rise with us in the morning; nor will it wholly desert us at night. And, what is very extraordinary, the more studious we are to banish it from our thoughts, the more obstinately will it return into the mind.

AND this is absolutely necessary for a set of beings designed, as *we* are, for another and a better state. For though death be the principal object of our terror, yet it does not confine our meditations to itself. It leads to a train of the most useful thoughts. It hurries us through all the different scenes, which commence upon our leaving the world. And whether we will or not, we find ourselves, by an easy transition from the views of death, summoned before the bar of our Redeemer, and condemned or acquitted, according to our works. And, in this respect, it cannot be denied, the fear under consideration is of vast importance; since it continually reminds us of a life to come, calls in the motions of a vain, sensual, and earthly heart, begets within us a becoming seriousness, disposes us to listen to the voice of religion, and prepare for that happier world, the prospect of which is unfolded to us in the gospel. Such is the natural tendency of that passion, which wrought so powerfully in Hezekiah, and which prevails, in a greater or less degree, in us all: and, when restrained within due bounds, we plainly perceive, it is both innocent and useful.

THUS we have considered the fear of death, as implanted in us by the wise author of our frame; and have shewn how it may be improved to the purposes of religion, and made subservient to our future happiness. But there are other accidental causes, which have raised our terrors to an undue height.

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Such, for instance, as the prejudices of childhood and youth, which grow up with us, as we advance in life, and cannot be wholly corrected by the wisdom and experience of riper age. The awful apparatus of death makes a deep impression on the infant mind. The shroud, the coffin, the funeral bell, are objects peculiarly shocking to that period of life. Hence the child seldom hears or thinks of its departure, without recollecting all the melancholy circumstances, which may attend it. And the same principle has its influence over men, who are only children of a larger growth. From their idea of death, they cannot separate the articles above recited. They view themselves as already borne in solemn state to the place appointed for all the living. They fright themselves with the narrow confines of the grave. They think of their odious appearance, when the king of terrors shall have defaced them with his horrid scroll; when the worms shall feed sweetly on them, and their whole frame return to its native dust. These, and a thousand other dreadful images, will often haunt the good man upon his death-bed. And, without all controversy, they rushed in upon the mind of Hezekiah, and caused that worthy prince to *weep sore*.

BUT this is not all; the tender connexions we leave behind, will add new horrors to our last change. Who can think of bidding a final adieu to the fond parent, the amiable consort, the dutiful child, without emotions of the most distressing kind? If the absence of a few days, from the embraces of those we love, is productive of such uneasiness, why may not "rivers of water run down our cheeks," when we consider, that the "eyes which now see them, must see them no more"? When we call to mind, that
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that we can *never, never* return to them, can never hear of their welfare, can know nothing more of them, than if we had never been ! And will not heaven forgive the tear, that is shed on such an occasion ? Will not a merciful Redeemer pardon the man, who relucfs at leaving a helpless family to the mercy of the world ? Who can think of expofing his tender babes to the fnares and temptations of this evil ftate, without a hand to fupply their wants, or a friend to direct their ways ? Suppofing a perfon in this, or a fimilar fituation, can we wonder, if the profpect of death was very alarming, and *he*, like Hezekiah in the text, fhould *weep fore* ?

BUT another caufe, which makes us fo fearfully apprehenfive of dying, is the pain, which, we imagine, accompanies that great event. If the bare lofs of a limb will throw us into fuch agonies, we conclude, the lofs of life muft be effected by much greater. And this conceit is ftrengthened by the appearance of many perfons in their laft moments. When we fee them all over convulfed and diftorted ; when we hear their dying groans, behold their eyes rolling, and obferve their expiring gasp, we cannot perfuade ourfelves, but their feelings comport with their looks.

BUT this is undoubtedly a grofs miftake. Many are the pains we endure in life, which are infinitely more diftrefling, than thofe which attend our departure. After long ficknefs, the body lofes its fenfibility. And when this is the cafe, every new wound, that is opened in us, nature kindly covers with a total difregard. We cannot fuffer pain beyond a certain degree. Hence the moft dreadful maladies, after a while, fpend their united rage upon us in vain. Let not any, therefore, tremble at death
merely

merely on account of the agony of dying, since it is more than probable they have felt as great, or perhaps greater, many times in their past lives.

BUT to proceed—We enter the valley of death with a timid reluctance, because we know not the country to which it leads. With such faculties as we possess, it is impossible we should have any idea of the invisible world. We cannot discern it through the veil of flesh, and no traveller has ever yet returned to bring us intelligence. And though the gospel has thrown some light upon the subject; yet, whenever it employs our thoughts, we find ourselves lost in the contemplation. This, therefore, is another circumstance, which renders death an object of terror. Could we form any tolerable conception of the ensuing state, our fears would be less excited. But when we consider, that we leave the present, for an undiscovered country; our familiar friends, for a new acquaintance; when we call to mind the different scenes and changes that will take place, the new objects, which will dart before us; in fine, when we recollect, that we are about to enter into a mode of being, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,” we cannot preserve our usual serenity. The blood will retire to the heart upon such reflection, in spite of all our endeavours to prevent it.

LASTLY—We shudder at the thought of dying, because we are well assured, we shall next appear at the bar of our Redeemer. After death comes the judgment. No sooner shall we close our eyes upon *this* world, than we shall open them upon *another*. Is it, then, matter of surprise, that any person should tremble at an event, which would introduce him to “Jesus the mediator, and God the judge of all?” Who that has read the scripture representation of the last day, that

that has seen the heavens rolled back as a scroll, that has heard the trumpet sound, that has beheld the son of man on the throne of his glory, and all the dead, both small and great, assembled around; who that has any faith in the gospel revelation, could resign himself to death, in this view of it, with perfect composure? The lustre of such a scene overbears us, even in the meridian of health. What wonder, then, if, exhausted with pain and sickness, the mind should be almost ready to sink under it? If, at its greatest distance, it strikes us with such terror, well may we start back, when we perceive it just at hand!

HAVING now finished our observations upon the nature, cause, and measure of this weakness, we shall conclude the discourse with some directions, as the best remedy against it. And from what has been said, you will not dispute the necessity of fear, in some proper degree. That it is absolutely essential to beings, circumstanced as we are, is too plain to need further support. All, therefore, I shall attempt, at present, will be to fortify you against that unmanly fear, which wrought so powerfully in Hezekiah, and at length betrayed him into the weakness in the text.

1. AND in order to this, let us, first, make the thought of dying familiar to our minds. The most frightful objects lose their native horrors, when we have long accustomed ourselves to dwell upon them. Come when he would, we should then receive that grim tyrant with less surprize. The conduct of Hezekiah was probably owing to an extreme tardiness in this respect. Had he permitted the contemplation of his last change to employ a suitable portion of his time and thoughts, he would not have prayed so ardently, nor have wept so sore.

SECONDLY

2. **SECONDLY**—Let it also be our great concern to live in continual preparation for the hour of death. If we have no reason to hope that our iniquities are forgiven, or our sins covered, we may very justly stand aghast at the prospect of a speedy dissolution. But, when we can lay our hands upon our breast, and say, “we have fought a good fight, we have finished our course, we have completed the whole work, our maker gave us to do;” when we can produce the testimony of a good conscience, that “in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world,” there is little ground for terror or disquiet. When the general tenour of our lives has been conformable to the gospel, it argues folly, in the extreme, to yield ourselves up to the dominion of a slavish fear. As we have the highest reason, so should we rejoice in our dying moments, when we can challenge the character above, as properly descriptive of ourselves. And, though there may be some instances to the contrary, yet this comfort will be the portion of the greater part of those, who have “walked in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Though a Hezekiah may “weep sore,” and discover all that terror, which belongs only to the guiltiest persons, yet there are many others, who enter the valley of death with that manly resolution, which a conscious integrity should never fail to inspire.

3. **BUT**, thirdly, as an additional preservative against the fear of death, we should endeavour to get the better of those prejudices, which enter the mind in early life. Shame it is to any man, who has arrived at the full exercise of his powers, to suffer any uneasiness from this quarter. What though his lifeless corps be wrapped in the livery of the grave; what

what though he be confined within the narrow dimensions of a tomb; what though he "say unto corruption, thou art my father;" still none of these things need greatly move him. If he will be unconscious of his confinement, and feel no indignity offered to his remains, he may set his mind perfectly at ease.

4. NEITHER, fourthly, need he distress himself about those he may leave behind. There is a "father for the fatherless; and for the widow there is a God." He that "numbers the hairs of the head, and suffers not a sparrow to fall unnoticed to the ground," will never, surely, forget his rational offspring. A becoming dependence on the care and protection of heaven will therefore be a great support in our last hours. And if we are thoroughly possessed of this worthy principle, we shall not despond, when called hence, though torn from the nearest connexions; and at a time, when our presence with them was most devoutly to be wished.

5. AGAIN—Just apprehensions of that God, before whom we are going to appear, and of that judge, at whose tribunal we are summoned, will have a great tendency towards allaying our fears. It is not a stern tyrant, to whom we must give an account; but a merciful parent, "who knows our frame, and remembers we are dust;" who will make all possible allowance for our many imperfections, and will deal with us according to the principles of infinite kindness and benevolence. It is not an inexorable judge, who will pronounce our doom; but one, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been tempted as we are, though without effect.

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In a word, if it is "appointed unto all once to die, and the grave is the home of all the living," let us each now seriously lay it to heart. Is it a truth, my hearers, that yet a little while, and you and I shall be no more? Will your ears, which hear these words, be soon barred in silence, and my lips, which utter them, soon cease to move? Will your eyes, which behold this light, be closed in darkness, and my heart lie still, which now throbs at the reflection? if so, let us each live only to die; that when we die, we may live forever. Let us so "number our days, as to apply our hearts unto wisdom." Let us "work while the day lasts, because the night is at hand, when no man can work." Then may we live in peace; and when we are called hence, quit the world without dismay. Then may we rest in certain hope of making part of that happy number, "who will have a place in the first resurrection, on whom the second death will have no power; who will be kings to God, and priests, and reign with him for ever and ever."

Sermon

Sermon XXXV.

On Life and Death.

ECCLESIASTES VII. 1.

**AND THE DAY OF DEATH, THAN THE DAY OF
ONE'S BIRTH.**

IT is natural for every man to speak according to his present feelings. In an hour of prosperity, life wears an inviting appearance. The troubles of it, we are ready to think more than balanced by its blessings. And we feel disposed to thank our creator for calling us into being. But let the scene change, and our sentiments change with it. Human life, imposed on us without our consent, is no longer a blessing. We regret that we were born. We impatiently say, "we would not live always." And we pretend to feel the whole force of that wise observation, that "*the day of death is better than the day of one's birth.*"

MAN is an inconstant, ingrateful being. Governed by his feelings rather than his judgment, he seldom abides by his own decisions. What he advances one hour, he will contradict the next. The estimate he forms of human life, is not the result of mature examination; it is the hasty conclusion of fancy, impatience, or resentment. His affairs have taken a favourable turn; for which reason, life is a blessing, and he laments that it is no longer. Or, he has met with some recent loss, and then existence is
a burden,

a burden, and it distresses him to reflect how long he shall groan under it.

To form a just idea of the present state, is the duty of every Christian. It is of importance, that we think neither too highly, nor too meanly of it. The former will expose us to disappointment; the latter will betray us into ingratitude. We are in the world; we were placed here by a wise and good being, and for some great and benevolent purpose. But the same wisdom, which introduced us to this state, will recal us from it. We were born, and we shall die. The question therefore is, which a wise man will contemplate with most pleasure, the day of his birth, or that of his dissolution? Solomon has decided in favour of the latter. "A good name," says he, "is better than precious ointment, and *the day of death, than the day of one's birth.*"

In discoursing upon these words, I shall inquire, upon what supposition the wise man proceeds in advancing this sentiment; what particular description of persons he had in view, and upon what comparison of things he formed this conclusion. A due examination of these particulars, will put a rational construction on his words.

I. FIRST—What did the wise prince take for granted, when he asserts, that the *day of death is a more joyful period than the day of one's birth*? Most certainly, that there would be a life hereafter, of more substantial and durable happiness. Upon any other supposition, his observation is not true. If at death we should be blotted out of existence, the moment of dissolution would be the most terrible that a rational being could contemplate. Bad as life is represented, it could not be so formidable, to a man of firmness and reflection, as the idea of a total annihilation,

lation. *To be* is so consonant to every human feeling, *not to be* so abhorrent from them, that many have asserted, an existence in misery was a comparative blessing; that they would prefer it to no existence at all. But this, I conceive rather to be a flight of fancy, than a sober thought. Men, who express themselves in this language, have not seriously considered its full import. A state of suffering, without interruption, and without end, is distracting even in contemplation!

BUT though it were preferable *not to be*, rather than to be forever miserable, still it will not follow, that the present circumstances of human life would dictate, or even justify the same choice. Certainly, many blessings fall to our share. And many more we might enjoy, were it not for our own folly and perverseness. In numberless instances, we are the authors of our own troubles. We abuse our liberty; act in direct opposition to our sense of right and wrong; and when we feel the inconveniences of our folly, we impiously throw the blame upon the governing providence of God. Thus the prodigal charges God with his poverty, the glutton with his infirmities, the drunkard with his weakness, or his pains. Not one of them considers, that he has been the destroyer of his own happiness.

To judge of life, we should inquire what creatures our maker designed we should be; of what enjoyments we are capable; and what share of present blessings actually falls to our lot. Did God intend that we should restrain our disorderly passions, and follow the dictates of a well-informed mind? and has he endued us with a moral ability to execute his intentions? then, a very formidable host of evils might be averted. They are mere intruders upon
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our enjoyment, and intruders by our own invitation. Has the author of our being so formed us, that we may find an inexhaustible source of pleasure in the practice of our duty? then it is not his fault, if we do not. And after all our follics, is it a fact, that we enjoy more than we suffer; that many more hours of pleasure than pain fall to the lot of men in general? If it be, then the observation in the text is not true, but upon the supposition of a happier life hereafter. If death put a final period to human existence, it is manifestly false, that the hour of our dissolution is "better than that of our birth." For an existence, under our present circumstances, must, in the view of a wise man, be more eligible than an utter extinction of being.

THE more we reflect upon the subject, the more we must be convinced, that men aggravate their afflictions, and overlook the favourable circumstances of their lives. They form wild and romantic ideas of happiness; and, because they are disappointed, cavil at the providence of God. But, however ingrateful man may treat the wise and holy being, who gave him life, and orders the circumstances of it, still it will remain true, that he enjoys more than he suffers. Existence is a blessing. To men in general, it is such; and it is capable of being rendered still more so. We must, therefore, call in the expectation of a future happy existence, in order to justify the observation in the text, to reconcile it with fact, and with the divine character. For, surely, Solomon would not insinuate, that it were better *not to be*, than to exist in the state and circumstances, in which infinite wisdom has placed the human species.

II. HAVING shewn upon what supposition the sentiment in the text is founded, I now proceed to the

the particular characters its author had in view. And when Solomon asserts, that "*the day of death is better than the day of one's birth,*" he is evidently speaking of good men. It is to them, a dying hour will be such a welcome period. They are the persons, who will exchange worlds to such advantage. In the next state, men of abandoned characters will be as miserable as they are guilty. Their works will follow them to the bar of God, will testify against them, and their accusing consciences will be a source of inconceivable anguish. The gospel is explicit on this subject. It asserts, in language the plainest and most intelligible, that, in the state approaching, the condition of *good* and *bad* men will be essentially different. The former will enjoy pleasures, which no tongue can describe: the latter will suffer torment, which no words can express. Such is the language of revelation.

AND I would ask, is it not natural to suppose, from what we now discover of a divine government, that virtue and vice must be productive of the consequences here ascribed to them? Does not something of the kind take place in the present world? By indolence and extravagant living, a careless wretch dissipates his estate. Does God interpose, by miracle, to preserve him from ruin? Out of mercy to a thoughtless creature, does he suspend the laws of nature, or change the course of things? No. He resigns him up to poverty; and his folly becomes his punishment. Again—instead of using with moderation, a man abuses the bounties of heaven to the purposes of intemperance and sensuality. What is the consequence? that he enjoys the delights of sense without inconvenience or interruption? by no means. His own nature resents the violence offered
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to it: and by his bodily pains and infirmities he is chastised for his excessive folly.

AND why may not something, similar to this, take place beyond the grave? Operating according to an established constitution, why may not our vices draw after them their own punishment? That God is infinitely kind and merciful; that he is our benevolent parent, can be no objection. Because this same merciful being, this parent, does suffer us, in the present world, "to eat of the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices." From heaven, his seat of blessedness, he does look down upon the children of men; he sees them render themselves vile, and is a spectator of their misery. When the prodigal abandons himself to sloth and extravagance, he does not clip the wings of his treasures, lest they should fly away. When the drunkard conspires against his own constitution, he does not defeat the conspiracy. He does not work a miracle to support or restore the tottering frame. No. Things take their own course, and natural causes produce their proper effects. These are facts, and yet they are not urged by way of objection to the divine goodness.

WHY, then, should the benevolence of the Deity oblige him to interpose, to correct, by miracle, our vicious habits, or to prevent their consequences beyond the grave? How is his character, as a parent, more concerned in one case, than the other? Is present suffering consistent with his benevolence? then certainly we may suffer in a future world. Does God punish us here? then, surely, he may punish us hereafter. This undeniable fact, that vice tends to misery, that it depraves our nature, and unfits us for rational happiness, affords the strongest presumption, that men, who live in sin, and die impenitent, will

will feel hereafter the ill effects of their folly and disobedience. From the present course of events, and order of divine providence, it is natural to reason after this manner.

BUT how certain is it, that vice will be productive of future misery, if we may credit the revelation of Jesus Christ? In the new-testament, the righteous displeasure of God is denounced against all ungodliness of men. We there read of "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," of a "second death," of a mortifying separation from Jesus Christ and the holy angels, and an ignominious exile from the realms of light and glory. These repeated declarations of holy writ must have some meaning, and they must be true. And the least we can infer from them is, that the ill effects of moral evil here, are but a prelude to more dreadful consequences hereafter.

GRANTING this, how certain is it, that the righteous only will have reason to welcome the hour of their dissolution? Men of corrupt hearts, and abandoned morals, will exchange this state for a worse. Upon the principles of the gospel, they will go from a world, where they enjoy more than they suffer, and where they suffer less than they deserve, to a state, where their misery will be proportioned to their guilt. Here society is made up of good men and bad: and the latter derive great advantage from the virtues of the former. To say the least, the portion of moral good there is in the world, alleviates the circumstances of wicked men, and for a time suspends their extreme misery. But in the resurrection state, the righteous will be severed from the wicked, and the degraded part of mankind will be abandoned to all the consequences of prevailing iniquity. In this view, it is evident, no situation in life can be

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compared

compared to theirs. To such, therefore, as be disobedient, and obey not the truth, better is the day of their birth, than that of their dissolution. Better is the time of their sojourning here, than their journey's end. For while they are in the world, they may become reconciled to God. But between death and the resurrection, no moral change can be effected. With the same corrupt habits, the same guilty consciences, with which they left the world, they will appear before the tribunal of their judge.

HAVING shown upon what presumption the text is founded, and to what description of persons it particularly refers, I now proceed to justify the remark of the wise man, by a comparison of the two periods of our birth and dissolution, and the different states, to which they respectively introduce us.— And, first, the day of our birth introduces us to a world, where we shall meet with many severe trials, where our virtue will be exercised in a variety of ways, though, upon the whole, good may predominate. Every man has his troubles, and his enjoyments. A share of affliction is the lot of humanity. And though impatient mortals may be disposed to contemplate the dark side of life, and to represent things worse than they are, yet it cannot be pretended, they have no reason to aspire after a happier state. The truth is, “we do receive good things at the hand of God, and at his hand we receive evil.” But the hour of death will terminate our sufferings. All pains will cease with the dissolution of our bodies. And when we rise again, we shall be admitted to a state of perfect and endless felicity. Such being the destination of a good man, is not the day of his death better than the first moment of his existence?

SECONDLY

SECONDLY—The day of our birth introduces us to a state of comparative darkness and ignorance. Here we are continually perplexed with doubts and difficulties. Few things fall within our comprehension. And we are subjected to the cravings of an insatiable curiosity. To adopt the language of an apostle, we “see but through a glass darkly, and know but in part.” Not so limited our views, so partial our attainments, in the heavenly state. In that world, we shall “see as we are seen, and know as we are known.” Our doubts will be solved, our difficulties removed. Light and knowledge will be poured in upon our minds; and from our increasing attainments, we shall derive unspeakable happiness.

THIRDLY—The day of our birth ushers us into a world, where we must toil for a subsistence; where every rising sun will awaken us to new cares and labours. From these, the day of death will afford a welcome relief. “I heard a voice from heaven, saying, write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; yea, saith the spirit, from henceforth, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.” No cares, no worldly concerns, will find their way into that celestial abode, which is prepared for the righteous. There every want will be supplied; And the active spirit will find sufficient employment in contemplating the character and works of God, and proclaiming his praises.

FOURTHLY—The day of birth introduces us to a state, where our minds will be often diverted from sacred things, where our devotions will be frequently interrupted, where virtue will sometimes unsuccessfully conflict with temptation, and where, from the nature of our situation, we can be sanctified but in part. Not so, the heavenly world. In the future abode

abode of the righteous, we shall be raised above the reach of temptation. Our progress in piety and holiness will meet with no interruption. We shall run and not be weary. "Our path, like the morning sun, will shine more and more." Admitted to the kingdom and presence of our father, we shall never fall: but shall be enabled to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. In that world, our work will be praise. An everlasting sabbath remains for the people of God. There we shall enjoy the pleasures of pure devotion. And the service of God, while it constitutes our chief employment, will be a source of unspeakable felicity.

FIFTHLY—The day of our birth introduces us to a state, where (comparatively speaking) we are at a distance from God; where we are absent from our great friend and benefactor, Jesus Christ; where we are excluded from the blest society of superior beings, and where we longingly wait to join our departed friends. The day of death will admit us to an intercourse with them. In the heavenly state, we shall behold the face of God. Jesus Christ will be our companion in blessedness. We shall join the general assembly and church of the first-born; and unite with the perfect spirits of the just. The parent will there embrace the child, from whom he had been long divided by death. The friend will welcome the friend to the realms of glory. And the whole ransomed of the Lord will congratulate each other on their mutual felicity.

FINALLY—We are born to die; we die to live forever! and for this reason, *the day of one's death is better than the day of our birth.* If existence be a blessing, it must be infinitely enhanced by the perpetuity of it. But it is the privilege of good men to die

die no more. "Their corruptible will put on incorruption, their mortal immortality." Had they "sown to the flesh, they would reap corruption : but having sown to the spirit, they will reap life everlasting." "Blessed and holy is he, who hath part in the first resurrection ; on such, the second death hath no power." His debt is paid : his enemy disarmed : his destroyer swallowed up in victory !

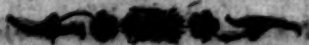
ALL these things considered, how just the observation of the wise man, and how instructive ! The end of life is better than the beginning of it, if the expectations of a Christian have any foundation.—Is there a state beyond the grave, where the virtuous will be immortally happy ? Is it the design of our creator, that we shall rest from all our labours, be delivered from all our sufferings, be united to our departed friends, admitted to his presence, behold the face of our divine Redeemer, and share his felicity ? Have we the certain hope of this blessedness ? Then, surely, it is better to die than to be born ; more eligible to be at our journey's end, than just entering upon it. Through hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, hath promised, the death of a good man must be a more joyful event, than his first introduction to being.

LET us, then, improve this thought, not merely as a curious speculation, but as a practical principle. Under the influence of it, let us pass the time of our sojourning in fear ; and by a conscientious obedience to the divine laws, let us prepare for our dissolution. A life of honour and integrity, a sober and a godly life, will afford us the highest pleasure, when we have arrived at our journey's end. That time will soon come. Happy for us, if we are prepared for it. If we have lived well, we shall "die the death of the righteous, and our last end will be like his."

FOR

For the honour of human nature, there are some, who live like Christians, and whose last hours, we have reason to think, are their best. To one, who deserves an honourable mention on this occasion, who merits the grateful remembrance of this society, we have lately paid the last offices of respect. He was the oldest member of the church, and through a long life sustained an unspotted reputation. Active, laborious, and honest, he discharged his duty towards God, and towards man. From high life, high characters are usually drawn. But I cheerfully embrace this opportunity to do justice to humble virtue, and to draw it from obscurity. Honour and shame arise from no outward condition. A life of innocence and virtue demands our grateful remembrance.

Let such a life be our highest ambition. Let us follow the good examples, which have been set before us. From them, let us learn to live, and learn to die. In every view, the improvement of human life is of infinite importance. As Christians, we confidently expect a future existence. And notwithstanding all our endeavours to impose upon ourselves, we do believe in our hearts, that we must be holy before we can be happy. Then let us instantly attend to our tempers and lives. Let us improve all the abilities and advantages we enjoy. So will our evening sky be fair and serene. In the most pressing exigency of nature, we shall find comfort. And with our last breath we shall confirm the wise observation, that "a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth."



Sermon XXXVI.

The Approach of a new Year.

PSALM XC. 9.

"WE SPEND OUR YEARS AS A TALE THAT IS TOLD."

AS this day closes another year, I could think of no words more suited to the occasion, than those which I have now read. It has, indeed, been customary with me to defer those remarks and inquiries, counsels and exhortations, naturally suggested by the revolution of seasons, and the progress of time, till the actual commencement of a new year. But as this is not merely the last sabbath, but the last day in the year, there seems to be something solemn in it; something, which, I would hope, will give weight to the sentiments that may be advanced in the following discourse.

Moses, that eminent servant of God, if we may credit tradition, was author of the Psalm, whence I have taken the text. It contains many excellent remarks on the nature of God, and the destination of man. Having done homage to the Deity, as a being self-existent and everlasting, he proceeds in this pathetic strain: "Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, return, ye children of men. Thou carriest them away as with a flood. In the morning, they are like grass, which groweth up: in the evening, it is cut down and withereth. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath; *we spend our years as a tale*

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tale that is told." It is not necessary to pursue the pathetic strain ; nor to inquire by what particular events Moses was led to bewail the condition of man. Our time may be more usefully employed in bringing the subject home to ourselves, in communing with our own hearts, in reviewing the year, and inquiring to what purpose it has been added to our lives.

GOD, who is the fountain of wisdom and goodness, never acts without a benevolent design. These divine perfections were in exercise, when he called us into existence. And our preservation, during another year, must be ascribed to the same cause.—Through help obtained of God, we continue to this moment : and we are upheld in being, because he has ends to accomplish, worthy of his transcendent wisdom and benevolence. The point, therefore, to be decided, is this, whether we have spent the year in such a manner, as will bear a review ; whether we have lived better than in any year preceding ; whether we have reason to think, that it will turn to a future good account.

By the terms used in the text, the author meant to express the shortness of human life. Our years run out like a tale that is soon told and ended. But, as a tale may be uninteresting and unimproving, I would choose to understand the words as expressive rather of the loss, than of the rapid progress of time. We spend our years to as little purpose, and with as little real improvement, as they who lend their ear to the most idle and improbable tale. Putting this construction on the words, let us now inquire to what particular description of persons they may be applied, and whether we are included in the number.

FIRST—At the termination of any year, who may be said to have spent it as a tale which is told? I answer, every man who is not, in moral respects, wiser and better, in consequence of so much time added to the period of human probation. Whatever acquisitions we have made, if we have made none in religion, we have lost a year. A portion of time is gone, which can never be recalled. We have made a year's advance towards the grave, without a year's improvement, and without any new qualifications for the kingdom of heaven.

To those, who have been in the habit of treating serious things with contempt, this may appear a very inconsiderable loss. It may appear such to those, who, without being despisers of religion, are so unaware of the uncertainty of life, as to calculate on years to come. Even false views of religion, particularly as it respects a moral change, may betray persons into the same error. To have spent a year as a tale which is told, can produce no great anguish in a mind corrupted by passion, and persuaded that revelation is a fable. They, who have reasoned themselves out of all belief of a future state, can easily acquiesce in an addition to their lives, without any valuable addition to their virtues. But, when in this place, I always consider myself as addressing those, who are prepossessed in favour of the gospel. I have no right to think that any deny the principles of religion, or undervalue its expectations; who visit a place, where those principles are discussed, and where such expectations are vindicated. I must, therefore, pursue the subject before me, under the conviction, that all, who hear me, would regret the loss, if it should appear, that another year had passed away like a tale which is told.

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BUT, as I have before observed, such must be the alarming discovery, if the concerns of religion have been neglected. It is very possible, that the industry of a year may have improved our outward circumstances; and, in the course of it, that we have increased in this world's goods. The convenient dwelling, or the stately dome, may have risen up before our eyes. We may have added house to house, and field to field. We may have attained to honours, which had long tempted our ambition. We may have extended our acquaintance with the numerous objects, which present themselves in the fields of science. This day may witness great accessions to our property, our honour, our influence in society, and our mental improvements; it may witness an increase of outward good, wholly unexpected at the commencement of the year. Still, if no other acquisitions have been made, we have not lived, in the highest sense of the term; lived to the glorious purpose, for which we were created.

THE happiness of our future condition is independent of any of those external good things, which I have just enumerated. Riches on earth will not accumulate treasures in heaven. That honour, which comes from man, will not ensure the honour, which comes from God. Neither will our accommodations in this world entitle us to better accommodations in the world to come. In our Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, our Saviour would have told us. He is now gone to prepare a place for us. But, to be admitted into that place, our hearts must have been improved, not our outward circumstances; we must have become rich in good works, have laid up in store a good foundation against the time to come. The prosperous, therefore, may adopt the language

language of the text, if they have not been melted by the goodness of God; and if the favours conferred on them have not excited them to obedience.

BUT, if those who have thought of nothing, who have pursued and obtained nothing, except such transient blessings as I have now described; if they may exclaim, *we have spent a year like a tale that is told*, much more would this confession become those, who have wasted it in idleness and dissipation, in pleasures, which ruin the constitution, and harden the heart! Better is it to be too worldly-minded, than too much addicted to the gratification of those lusts, which war against the soul. Persons, who have risen to power, may employ that power for the good of society. And from the riches, which others have accumulated, some public and extensive good may be derived. Though their exertions have been stimulated by a worldly principle; though they have not laboured for their own souls, yet they may have laboured for the community. Institutions for the employment and reward of the industrious, for the relief of the miserable, for the encouragement of learning, and, I may add, religion, have, in many instances, proceeded from an inordinate love of the world.

BUT what benefit does society derive from folly, idleness, and extravagance? To what useful purpose do they live, who live merely in pleasure? They consume the fruits of industry whilst they contribute nothing to their production. They injure individuals by their vices, and the public by their example. And, which, as it respects them, is of infinite importance, they injure themselves, not merely by losing the term of probation, but by acquiring habits, which must be productive of unspeakable misery in the state approaching. Of all men, therefore, they have

have most reason to accuse themselves of folly and madness, when it is considered in what manner they have spent their years.

THE melancholy confession, in the text, ought not, however, to be restricted to those who have been remarkably addicted to the pursuits of pleasure, or the pursuits of gain. There are persons, in whose outward circumstances, a year has produced no visible alteration. If, then, it has added nothing to their character, it will justify the application of the text. Within the term of a year, there are many opportunities for religious improvement. There are many Sabbaths, and some other days, consecrated to the public offices of religion. There are many seasons favourable to the study of the sacred scriptures, favourable to inquiries of a serious nature, favourable to meditation and prayer. There are also many opportunities to receive good impressions from the conversation and example of those, who unfeignedly believe the gospel of Christ, and who live by faith in the son of God. Though the world, with its necessary cares and duties, will command a large portion of the year, yet there will be all those opportunities to improve, and all those seasons for acquiring wisdom and virtue, which have been now mentioned. Whoever, therefore, has not availed himself of them, has spent a year in such a manner, as can be reconciled neither to his principles nor expectations!

I now proceed to a second inquiry, namely, whether we are included in this description. Considering the words of Moses, in reference to the year now closing, ought we to adopt them as expressive of our own conduct? To ascertain this point, it will be necessary to descend to particulars. First, are we conscious of an increasing love of God, and more
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fervent devotion, than when we entered on the year ? During the course of it, we have experienced many blessings. The eye of our heavenly benefactor has been upon us. His arm has protected us. His bounty has supplied our wants ; and his visitation has been our support. We have, moreover, enjoyed the benefit of religious instructions, publicly dispensed. We have repeatedly visited this house, and been present during the services to which it is consecrated. Many private opportunities for contemplating the character of God, and doing homage to his perfections, have also been granted to us. In a word, we have had means and motives adequate to our confirmation in the principles of piety, and our improvement in the love and fear of our maker.

HAVE these desirable effects been produced ? Upon a careful inspection of our hearts, do we perceive a more lively sense of the perfections of the Deity, more gratitude to the author of all good, a more fervent devotion, and a more earnest desire to obtain his favour, in consequence of the moral cultivation of another year ? If we have consulted the sacred volume, have its discoveries of the nature and perfections of God increased our veneration of his august and benevolent character ? Are we more patient and resigned, than at any other period of life ? Are we more attentive, than ever, to all those duties, which more immediately respect our maker ? Has our piety gained strength ; and is the love of God more abundantly shed abroad in our hearts, than when the duties of a new year were set before us ? If we are conscious, that our thoughts are more than ever directed towards God, that our affections are more powerfully than ever drawn towards him ; when we review his mercies, that we feel more grateful

ful than in times past; and that we experience a pleasure, before unknown, in drawing near to him by prayer and supplication, we may be assured that we have not lived in vain. So far as we have made any progress in christian piety, we have made a proper return for the continuance of life, and the means and advantages of a religious nature, which have occurred in the course of a year.

To proceed—Have we been more attentive, than we once were, to those duties, which relate to our fellow-men? In our transactions with others, have we more sensibly felt our obligations to do that which is fair and honest? Have we been more liberal in our measures, more faithful to engagements, more benevolent, in all respects, than before we had this opportunity for strengthening our social principles, and confirming them by practice? For this end, we have been spared another year. God has continued our lives, and powers of social action, that we might improve in justice, fidelity, and mercy. If, therefore, we have improved, one of the objects of divine benevolence has been accomplished.

To determine this point, let every one, who is capable of self-examination, and who wishes to know the real state of his morals, study his own character. Let him put the solemn question to his own conscience, whether, in his temporal pursuits, he has been more careful than ever to do justly, and to exercise mercy; whether he has thought less of his own interest, and more of the interest of others. Let him appeal to facts, and see if they testify in his favour. If they do, this day must be a season of triumph; if not, a season of deep humiliation and remorse.

To pursue the important subject—Can we appeal
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to God, who searches the human heart, and in his presence can we say, that the term of probation, furnished by another year, has been subservient to the conquest of our passions, and to the better regulation of all our affections? Are we more patient and humble, more disposed to exercise forbearance, more ready to forgive, more inclined to do kind offices to the evil and unthankful; more pure in heart, more circumspect in our conversation, more exemplary in our lives, than before a new succession of seasons had completed their revolution? If we suffer wrong, do we feel less resentful than at the period to which I now allude? Do we think more humbly of ourselves than we then did? Have our efforts, during a year, to keep ourselves unspotted of the world, been crowned with more than common success? Whatever we may have done in times past, we have not spent this year like a tale which is told, if we have thus succeeded in the concerns of religion.

FINALLY—It becomes those, who make a public profession of Christianity, to inquire, whether, as disciples of the blessed Saviour, they have gained or lost; whether they are rejoiced or humbled, upon a review of their general conduct. In how many solemn addresses to Almighty God, have you assisted, since the year began? How many times have you declared your assent to the religion of Jesus, and your determination to make it the rule of your faith and practice? How many times have you commemorated the astonishing love of your divine Redeemer, and declared that you would henceforth live not unto yourselves, but unto him who died for you, and rose again? How often have you been called to admire his great example; and how solemnly have you engaged to walk as he walked? Have any of these

these resolutions been carried into effect? Have you thought more of his doctrines and precepts, his sufferings and example, than before you entered into these new engagements, and formed these resolutions? Are your actions more than ever like his, who was a pattern of all goodness? Do you possess more of his heavenly temper, more of that ardent devotion, meekness, and compassion; more of all the religious affections, which adorned the Saviour; more of the true spirit of the gospel, in consequence of this addition to your lives, and to your opportunities for growing wiser and better? It requires no very great effort to look back, and to compare your improvements at the commencement and close of the year. If you have gained, the probability is, that you will gain still more: but very different is the prospect, if religion, and its momentous concerns, have been overlooked.

It cannot be too often repeated, that habits are soon fixed; and that we early form that character, with which we leave the world. Every year, therefore, which is lost to religion, increases the difficulty of bringing our minds to a cordial reception of it, as a standard of moral action. This unquestionable fact should awaken within us a most serious concern to disengage ourselves from other objects, so far, at least, as to do justice to our own souls. For what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his interest in those future blessings, which are offered in the gospel? On the pillow of death, what comfort shall we derive from the possessions, which we shall leave behind; from the pleasures, which we have enjoyed; from the sphere, in which we have moved; from the style, in which we have lived; from the flattering attentions, which we have received;

ed; from any thing, which has ministered to our pride, or gratified our senses? In whatever light we may now view them, these objects will lose all their importance, when we are on the confines of another world.

SUFFER me, then, to recommend an immediate attention to those things, which concern our everlasting peace, and which will have a most important influence on our future condition. You are not required to reject those good things, which relate merely to the present state: but what religion requires is this, to secure that good part, which cannot be taken from you. Let this be the subject of your daily prayers; and let this be the work assigned to the approaching year, and to all the years, which may intervene between this, and the moment of dissolution. Be no longer slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Let the time to come, be an improvement on the time past. Be not conformed to this world, but be conformed to the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Sermon XXXVII.

The History of the Lord's-Supper.

1 CORINTHIANS, x. 16.

"THE CUP OF BLESSING, WHICH WE BLESS, IS IT NOT THE COMMUNION OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST? THE BREAD, WHICH WE BREAK, IS IT NOT THE COMMUNION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST?"

NOTHING can be better attested, than the sacred institution of the Lord's-supper; nothing more intelligible, than its nature and moral design. In allusion, perhaps, to the passover, our Lord directed his disciples to eat bread, and to drink wine, in remembrance of him. This command they received the same night in which he was betrayed. "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new-testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sin." This account of the institution is furnished by the evangelist Matthew. Mark and Luke mention the same transaction. And St. Paul says, he received his knowledge of it immediately from the Lord. All that he had delivered, relative to this subject, was, according to his own account, communicated by a special revelation from heaven. From the unanimous testimony of these writers, we must, therefore,

therefore, admit not only the antiquity of the Lord's-supper, but that it is an ordinance of divine appointment. Admitting the sacred writings to be authentic records, we cannot possibly evade this conclusion.

BUT though nothing can be imagined more simple in its original institution, than the Lord's-supper, yet nothing has been more darkened by superstition, or corrupted by the fancies of men. The successive abuses of this rite form a most astonishing article in the history of Christians. They are a monument of human sagacity and weakness. We can scarcely believe, at this day, what monstrous absurdities were grafted upon an institution, which appears as little capable of abuse as any rite whatever.

IN a discourse, not long since, I attempted an historical account of the ordinance of *baptism*. This led me to mention the changes it underwent from the time of its institution to the present day. The ordinance of the supper I would now treat in the same manner. Its divine appointment I have already noticed. My business then, at this time, is to consider what new ideas were superadded to it; how its nature and design were gradually misunderstood; by what means it was rescued from grosser corruptions; and how far it has attained to its original purity. This view of the subject will furnish some useful reflections, and may be a suitable preparative for the solemn duty, in which we are soon to engage.

AND the first alteration this ordinance underwent, was from a memorial of the sufferings and death of its author to a *sacrament*, or oath of fidelity to him. This idea was borrowed from an established practice in the Roman army. All the soldiers bound themselves by an oath to be true to their general. This was administered in form, and was styled a *sacrament*.
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The hint readily took with Christians ; and they, no doubt, with the best views, adopted the idea. They represented the Lord's supper as a sacrament, in the Roman sense of the word. Every time they communed, they considered themselves as renewing their oath of fidelity to Jesus Christ. This was evidently a deviation from the scripture account of the institution : but so small as to excite no alarm. No inconvenience could result from viewing the ordinance in this light.

BUT having once begun to improve upon this religious rite, Christians knew not where to stop. Accordingly, towards the close of the second century, the supper was considered not only as an *oath*, but a *mystery*. This idea was borrowed from the pagans. It is well known, there were secrets in the heathen religion, to which the common people were not admitted. What they were, has been differently conjectured. But some very ingenious writers suppose, the priest said in private, what he had asserted in public ; that, in the celebration of the mysteries, the many absurdities of paganism were exploded ; that the existence of one God was maintained, and some of the fundamental principles of natural religion imparted to those, who were worthy of so high a trust. This is the opinion of some ; and there seems to be some foundation for it. But whatever might be transacted or disclosed in private, this is certain, none but select persons were initiated into the mysteries. The vulgar were dismissed at the time of celebration ; and an oath of profound secrecy imposed upon the others.

THIS part of the heathen worship was very captivating in the eyes of Christians. Like their neighbours, they wanted something mysterious in their

their religion. To excite the curiosity of the world, and to produce a flattering distinction among believers, now became their ambition. Accordingly, the ordinance of the supper was turned from its original design, and perverted to this superstitious purpose. Christians affected to style it a mystery, "a tremendous mystery, dreadful solemnity, and terrible to angels." And those who partook of the elements, were supposed to be persons of superior wisdom and sanctity.

HAVING established this idea, superstition proceeded one step farther; and that was, to suffer none, who did not commune, to be present at the celebration of the Lord's-supper. The heathen mysteries were sacredly concealed. Those of the gospel ought not then to be celebrated in public. Accordingly, about the middle of the third century, a practice was introduced, some remains of which continue to this day. After the stated worship of the Lord's-day, the congregation was dismissed; the doors of the church closed and guarded: and then, concealed from every profane eye, the faithful received the holy communion.

LONG before this time, a sanctifying virtue had been ascribed to the elements. The bread and wine were supposed to derive some new and divine quality from the form of consecration. But still none pretended their substance was changed. This was reserved for a later period, when men were ready to believe any thing, however contrary to the testimony of their senses. As far as we have now proceeded, we cannot but reflect with astonishment at the weakness and folly of mankind. How surprising, that any should so misunderstand the words of our Saviour!

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How extraordinary, that the nature and design of this ordinance should be so universally overlooked!

BUT, the farther we recede from the apostolick age, the more numerous and absurd the corruptions of this originally innocent and useful rite. It was early objected to the christian religion, that it had no altars, and enjoined no sacrifices or oblations. Jews and heathen united in reproaching Christianity with this fact. Its professors, however, soon thought of an expedient to obviate this objection. They insisted, that the Lord's-supper was a proper sacrifice, and the communion table an altar. And by many, at this enlightened period, it is contended, that the body of Christ is offered in sacrifice, as often as the communion is duly administered.

BUT the most abominable corruption of this ordinance, the most absurd and impious in itself, and the most injurious in its consequences, is known by the name of *transubstantiation*. This improvement upon all former absurdities, first awakened the attention of Christians in the ninth century. A celebrated doctor of the church openly maintained, that the bread and wine were changed, not only into the real body and blood of Christ, but into that very body which had been born of the virgin Mary, which had been crucified, and raised from the dead. To this it was in vain to object the testimony of the senses. The words of our Saviour were produced in support of the doctrine. "This is my body, this is my blood," was opposed to every objection. And finally, the authority of the church established it as a most sacred article of faith. Thus were "the cup of blessing, which we bless, and the bread, which we break," changed from a memorial to an oath; then to a mystery; then to a sacrifice; and last of all, to the real body and blood of Christ,

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FROM these successive corruptions, the consequences, that would naturally ensue, may be easily imagined. At first, the whole body of Christians received the Lord's-supper. It was regularly administered the first day of the week. And all, who attended divine worship, joined in the communion. There was no distinction between the church and congregation in the apostolick age. He, who believed in Christ, professed his religion, and esteemed himself indispensably bound to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of it. But as soon as the institution was changed from a memorial, and an oath, to a sacred mystery, Christians began to pause. Superior qualifications were thought necessary to a participation of the elements. And many serious believers were afraid of profaning the Lord's table by their presence. They worshipped, therefore, with the faithful, but retired when the communion was administered.

THIS backwardness to commune increased as the ordinance became more an object of superstitious veneration. Of this we find many complaints in the history of the church. Those, who abstained from the supper, were reprov'd with great severity. And every argument was used to engage the people to attend. But such a religious horror had seized their minds, that few could be prevail'd on to comply with their duty. They considered the act too hazardous, and contented themselves with a lower degree of perfection.

THUS have I mentioned some of the grosser abuses of the Lord's-supper. The recovery of the genuine doctrine was attempted, but not completed, by the celebrated reformer. Though he reprobated the idea of transubstantiation, yet he maintained that
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of the *real presence*. That is, he taught that the body of Christ was present with the elements, though their substance was not changed. This opinion was, in time, discarded, and that of a sanctifying virtue, accompanying the bread and wine, was admitted in its place. But as light increased, and the exercise of reason was encouraged, Christians attained to still more rational sentiments on the subject. And in this country, those of the congregational communion have recovered the genuine scripture doctrine, respecting the nature and efficacy of this rite. We believe, that there is nothing mysterious in the communion. We believe, that the "cup of blessing, and the bread," are only memorials of the body and blood of Christ: that his death is called up to view, as often as we receive them in a religious way. And we acknowledge the perpetual obligation of this ordinance. This is the doctrine of our church, and we have already seen it was that of our Saviour and his apostles.

THE subject, thus far considered, leads to some useful reflections. In the first place, it shows us, that the best things may be abused. Food and raiment may administer to our luxury and pride. Civil government may become an engine of oppression. Liberty may be a cloak for licentiousness. And the christian revelation, which is, beyond all dispute, an inestimable blessing, may be so misinterpreted, as to do incredible mischief to society. All these we know to be facts. Can we then wonder at the fate of this ordinance? Is it strange that the Lord's-supper should be corrupted to the degree we have already seen? By no means: it has shared the fate of all other things; and is, with them, a monument of human weakness. We have, therefore, only to be-
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will the folly of mankind ; and to be humbled, that we belong to an order of beings, who are so fatally inclined to pervert the truth, and to misimprove the greatest blessings.

SECONDLY—The subject we have been considering, shows us the necessity of exercising our own reason upon religious matters, and particularly carrying it with us to the study of the holy scripture. Authorities from the sacred volume are produced in favour of the grossest absurdities. The advocates for transubstantiation profess to derive their opinion from the fountain of divine truth. And it must be confessed, the words of our Saviour, literally taken, are in their favour. For, taking the bread, he did say, *this is my body* ; and presenting the cup, he did say, *this is my blood*. But what becomes of this boasted argument, if we insist, that reason and common sense shall put their comment upon the words ? It will instantly fall, and the whole superstructure, raised upon it, will vanish in a moment.

HENCE, then, the propriety, hence the absolute necessity, of calling in the aid of reason to the study of scripture. If we do not, what absurdities shall we not embrace ? We shall believe, that God has human parts, and human passions ! We shall suppose, that he is sometimes elated with joy ; at others, depressed with sorrow ! We shall imagine his happiness disturbed by the follies, or enhanced by the obedience of his creatures. And, with respect to the rite under consideration, we shall admit its most dangerous corruptions. For, that Christ himself may be created out of the elements ; that we do eat his real flesh, and drink his blood, will be true, if reason is not to be consulted in our religious inquiries.

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THIRDLY—We learn from this subject, the danger of even the smallest deviations from the word of God, or the most innocent human inventions. The Lord's-supper was an appointed memorial of his death. Thus the disciples considered it; and, in this view, it answered every moral purpose. But such plainness and simplicity did not suit the taste of Christians. Accordingly they began to innovate; and having thus forsaken their inspired guide, they wandered wherever their fancies led them. Most rapid is the progress of superstition. From one absurdity, men fly to another; and it is almost incredible, how soon the most important truth may be obscured and lost.

LET us, then, resolutely oppose the first advances of superstition. To the divine law and testimony, let us steadily adhere. Let the word of God be our only guide: and let us constantly study that word, in order to preserve the parity of our faith and practice. All the corruptions, which have deformed Christianity, are owing to our receiving for doctrines the traditions of men. Let the inspired writings be raised above all human authority, and the religion of Jesus will no longer affront the common sense of mankind.

FOURTHLY—Let us be thankful, that we live in an enlightened age; and, in particular, that we have been led, by the providence of God, to rational ideas of the Lord's-supper. Many of our fellow-christians are still groping in darkness. The far greater part of those, who profess our religion, believe, either that Christ is actually present in the bread and wine, or that they are converted into his body and blood. Hence they pay divine homage to the elements.—They imagine, that the very body of Christ is received

ceived by the communicant ; that the church feeds on him in the literal sense ; and that her spiritual growth and nourishment are to be wholly ascribed to this mystical repast.

BUT, blessed be God, none of these absurdities are among the articles of our faith. Our understandings are not so grossly affronted by our religion. We believe that Jesus Christ died for us, and that the supper was instituted to perpetuate the memory of this event. Thus our Saviour taught, and thus we believe. Wherefore, let us be thankful that our minds are so enlightened. Let us bless God, that we were born in a land of freedom, where the scriptures are accessible to all, and every man may examine for himself. And, more especially, let it excite our gratitude, that we have such frequent opportunities for religious communion, and that we are so well instructed in the nature and importance of this duty.

FINALLY—Let us cheerfully embrace the present opportunity of receiving the bread and cup in remembrance of our Lord. We have abundant reason to be thankful for this divine institution. It is a privilege and an honour, to which we have no claim. If, however, we be careful wisely to improve it, we shall find, by happy experience, that it is admirably calculated to promote the cause of religion in our souls. The oftener we call up the idea of our master, the better we shall love him. The oftener we reflect upon his sufferings and death, the more will he be endeared to us. And frequent communion with our fellow-christians, will certainly improve our friendship for each other. All these are the natural fruits of a regular and pious observance of this positive duty.

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LET us, then, approach the table of the Lord with grateful sentiments, and devout affections. Let "the cup of blessing, which we bless," remind us of that blood, which was shed on the cross, when the Lord and giver of life finished his benevolent work. Let "the bread, which we break," call up to view, his body, which was broken for us. And by a participation of these elements, may we be improved in faith, in love to Christ, in charity, and in every branch of evangelical obedience. Then will it be good for us that we have been here; and this pleasing intercourse, here below, will prepare us for a more delightful intercourse in that kingdom, which shall never be moved!

Sermon XXXVIII.

The Design of the Supper,

I CORINTHIANS, X. 17.

"WE ARE ALL PARTAKERS OF THAT ONE BREAD."

IF we examine the holy scriptures, we shall find, that nothing can be clearer, than the nature and design of the Lord's-supper. To remember a benefactor is undoubtedly a moral duty. To love them, who have loved us, and have exposed themselves for our benefit, must be acknowledged to be equally fit and reasonable in itself. And to love each other with

with the tenderness of brothers, must be felt to be a duty by the whole body of Christians. Upon these plain and undeniable principles, the ordinance of the holy supper is founded. Our Saviour instituted this religious feast, that his followers might always remember his death and passion, and be excited to mutual charity and good will. With this view, the rational part of the christian world have always observed this ordinance. And with this view will they continue to observe it, till its divine author shall again appear, and faith shall be swallowed up in vision.

BUT, though the scripture account of this ordinance is thus clear and intelligible, it cannot be denied, that many regard it in a very different light. Even among the primitive Christians, there were mistakes, which needed to be corrected. St. Paul alludes to some, which were a gross perversion of the Lord's-supper; and which really confounded it with a licentious revel. But still greater corruptions took place afterwards. In time, the communion was changed to a sacrifice; the cup was refused to the people; and the bread was exhibited as a proper object of supreme adoration.

WHEN science began to dawn on the christian world, these absurdities were exposed; and, by many, rejected. Still, however, the subject was embarrassed by human speculations. The question was urged, whether Christ was not present in the elements? Whether the communion may not be considered as a feast on sacrifice? Whether extraordinary virtue be not in the elements after consecration? Whether any have a right to partake, till they have certain experience of their qualification for heaven? These, and similar speculations, employed and agitated

agitated the christian community; nor is the controversy decided even at the present day.

A serious and judicious appeal to the holy scriptures will, however, afford all needed satisfaction to every devout inquirer. If we will suffer Christ and his apostles to speak for themselves, we shall easily discern the nature and design of the communion, by whom, and in what manner it ought to be celebrated. Not long before his death, our Lord took bread, and having given thanks, brake it, and distributed it among his disciples. After the same manner, also, he took the cup, and gave it to them to drink. Here is a plain account of the institution. It is unnecessary to inquire of what species of bread they partook, or of what wine they drank. Whether the former was unleavened, or the latter mingled with water, are inquiries of no consequence to the Christians of this age. For men, who reflect, it is impossible to lay any stress upon such circumstances. It is sufficient that the bread and the cup were received by the disciples; that they were received by special appointment of Jesus Christ; and in remembrance of him; and that the same usage was to continue in the church till the second coming of our Redeemer. Thus far we have the sacred scriptures on our side. In this representation of things, there is no mystery: but the communion appears to be a rational and useful institution.

In regard to the particular design of the Lord's supper, that may easily be collected. In the first place, we celebrate the communion, in order that we may always remember the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ; and be thus furnished with an effectual motive to universal obedience. The Saviour of men, though a person of unblemished character, was treat-
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ed with the utmost inhumanity. He was defamed, persecuted, denied, betrayed, condemned, and finally executed on the cross. To this death, painful and ignominious as it was, he cheerfully submitted, that he might give the highest evidence of his sincerity; and might be in a capacity for bringing life and immortality to light. This was a most wonderful act of goodness; the most extraordinary that was ever performed in the world. By suffering in this manner, our Saviour laid the foundation for pardon and salvation. He gave a mortal wound to the empire of darkness. And he opened to mankind, an alluring prospect beyond the grave.

THUS extraordinary in itself, and beneficial in its consequences, the death of our great master ought always to be remembered. There is the utmost propriety, that we should frequently call up a scene, with which universal nature seems to have been affected. When the Saviour expired, the sun hid his face! the dead awoke from their slumber, as if roused by the tragedy which had just been acted! the veil of the temple was rent in twain, as if it partook of the outrage, which was offered to the divine sufferer! the earth trembled, as though a conscious witness of the whole transaction! and, as if more susceptible of grief than the hearts of his enemies, even the rocks, the hardest parts of inanimate creation, were dissolved! Such were the circumstances attending the death of Jesus Christ. Ought we not, then, to remember that event? And is not the Lord's-supper wisely calculated to perpetuate its remembrance? When we surround the table, do we not, in a manner, put ourselves in the situation of those, who beheld him on the cross? Does not the bread represent his body in a state of suffering, and the wine his blood, which
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was shed ? And by receiving both the one and the other, do we not take a very effectual measure to preserve the memory of his wonderful passion ? Our Lord has gone into heaven. Left, therefore, we should forget him, he has been pleased to spread this table, and to invite us to the sacred feast. And if we come with a proper temper, we shall derive great improvement from this intercourse with him, and with each other.

AMONG the wonderful works, by which God manifested his regard for his ancient people, a most signal one was, his smiting the first-born in every house of the Egyptians, and passing over the houses of Israel. In this event, there was a display of mercy and vengeance. By depriving them of objects, which were particularly dear to them, God punished the Egyptians for their oppression. And, by sparing the first-born of Israel, he in some measure alleviated the burden of their sufferings ; and gave them an earnest of his future favours. That their minds might be properly affected with this extraordinary instance of goodness, it was necessary, that the whole transaction should be remembered. Accordingly, the passover was instituted ; and annually observed, with great solemnity, by the chosen people. This mysterious rite kept alive the remembrance of God's special kindness. It had a wise tendency to confirm their faith in him ; to produce a rational confidence in his care and mercy ; and to inspire them with unfeigned gratitude towards their preserver.

AND the same good ends may be answered by the institution of the supper. By means of the death of Christ, we obtain a far more important deliverance, than that which was wrought out for the nation of Israel. Measures are taken for our deliverance from the

the reigning power of sin, and from the malice of satan. By means of that gospel, which was sealed by the blood of Jesus, we may obtain our spiritual liberty. He came into the world, that he might bring forth those, who were bound ; that he might redeem the captive ; let the oppressed go free ; and preach the acceptable year of the Lord. These were the great ends of his mission ; and for the final accomplishment of these, he laid down his life. Is not, then, a commemorative representation of his death, an ordinance to be sacredly esteemed, and devoutly observed by Christians, till he shall come to be glorified by his saints, and admired by them who believe.

WHEN the passover was instituted, the Israelite was directed to explain the nature of it to his child, when, urged by a natural curiosity, he should ask the meaning of that ordinance. "And it shall be, when thy son asketh thee, in time to come, saying, what is this ? that thou shalt say unto him, by strength of hand the Lord brought us from Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord all the latter ; but all the first-born of my children I redeem." This account of the passover must be a high gratification to a young mind. And thus instructed, a reverence for the institution would naturally increase with his years.

AND why may not the same measure be taken to inspire an early respect for the Lord's-supper ? It appears to me, that there would be a manifest propriety in permitting our children to be present at the communion, as soon as they are capable of behaving with decency. The elements would naturally attract their

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notice; and the celebration of the communion would readily suggest some pertinent inquiries. Like the young Israelite, they would ask the meaning of these things. We might then recite to them the benevolent actions, and describe the amiable character of Jesus Christ. We might relate to them how many good things he did, and how many evil ones he suffered. We might tell them in how cruel and shameful a manner he was put to death. And, finally, we might point out the analogy between his death and the ordinance instituted in commemoration of it. To such a subject, the ears of a child would be open. And whilst an innocent curiosity was gratified, the heart might receive some lasting religious impressions.

THUS have I considered one great end of the communion, to perpetuate the memory of Jesus Christ, and to shew forth his death till he come. I proceed to observe, secondly, that by partaking of one bread, and drinking of one cup, charity and good will among Christians are, at the same time, expressed and promoted. At the Lord's table, the rich and poor, the high and low meet together. They unite in the same offices of devotion; and partake of the same spiritual feast. One and the same great event, they all commemorate; and they rejoice in hope of the same great salvation. Formed, in this manner, into a spiritual brotherhood and society, their hearts become mutually warmed by christian communion.—As often as they approach the table, they assure the world, that they are not ashamed of each other. And they take a very natural and effectual measure to extinguish all pride, envy, prejudice, malice, and every passion, which is unbecoming the temper of the gospel, or condemned by its laws.

FEASTING at the same table is a very natural expression

pression of love and good will. Such an intercourse in common life is generally interpreted as a mark of friendship. And we learn from ancient writings, that, whenever any covenant was made, or any dispute was compromised, the parties covenanting, or those, between whom a reconciliation had taken place, usually concluded the ceremony with a feast. This was to show that all differences were at an end; and that one spirit actuated both. In the same light we may consider the communion. It is a public declaration, that we esteem each other as friends; and, in a moral sense, that we have one heart, and one soul.

BUT further—Eating of the same bread, is not only a testimony of mutual love, but it is a measure divinely calculated to excite, increase, and confirm a principle of religious affection. Any kind of intercourse, whether for civil or moral purposes, tends to bind us to each other. Persons, whom we often see, and with whom we familiarly converse, naturally grow dear to us. The longer we are in habits of intimacy with them, the more we are disposed to befriend them; and the more interested we feel in their happiness. Hence the excellency of this ordinance. It brings us near to each other. It places us all upon a level. For a time, it makes us forget the civil distinctions of high and low, rich and poor. And contemplating the same divine Saviour, and uniting in the same offices of devotion, the native benevolence of our hearts is called into exercise; and we are led to an honourable imitation of those early Christians, whose love and good will were an object of universal admiration.

THIS is a point, on which I cannot but insist, because the honour of Christianity is greatly concerned in it. In the same degree, in which we live together

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in love and peace, the excellency of the gospel will be visible to the world. If we envy, reproach, or contend with each other, those, who are without, will never believe that we have any religion at heart. Nor will they suspect the sincerity of our professions, if we behave in a different manner. It is, therefore, of the last moment, that, when "we keep the feast, we should keep it, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

IN that last and most affectionate discourse, which our Lord made to his disciples ; which he delivered not long before his death, and at the time, in which he instituted the supper, he made particular mention of a friendly and benevolent temper ; and warmly recommended it to his followers. "This is my commandment," says he, "that ye love one another, as I have loved you." And the apostle John, who leaned upon our Lord's breast, and seems to have been a partaker of his most amiable spirit, urges this duty with like earnestness ; "Herein," says he, "is love ; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son, to be a propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." Again : "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he (that is Christ) laid down his life for us ; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." That is, we ought to love them sincerely and ardently : we ought to deny ourselves many things for their benefit ; and we ought to study their comfort, honour, and happiness. This is the true spirit of the gospel. If we are Christians, we shall have this temper. It will always accompany us to the Lord's table. And it will be improved and confirmed by partaking of that one bread, which is a fit emblem of our religious union, It

It is no uncommon thing for persons to suspect their worthiness to celebrate the communion. But I have long observed, and to my great mortification, that their scruples have generally risen from one source. They have suspected their love to God, their gratitude towards Jesus Christ, and the nature and strength of their faith. But this is only one view of the subject. The great question is, am I in love and charity with my fellow-Christians? Do I feel, as I ought to do, towards my neighbours? Do I feel as meek, patient, and forgiving, as my religion obliges me to be? Have I the temper of my great master? These are questions, which I have the utmost reason to ask my own heart. And it is possible, that the same inquiry might be profitably urged by all, who call themselves Christians.

THE two great ends for celebrating the communion, have now been discussed. We observe this ordinance, that we may preserve the memory of Jesus Christ, and be excited to love one another. And in this view of it, what objection can be made to this institution? Why is it necessary to urge an attendance on it, by so many arguments? Why is it necessary to labour the point so warmly, and so frequently, with the sober part of mankind, in order to engage them to come to the table? Do you object, that you are not so improved in piety and virtue, as to entitle you to such a privilege? This is one of the means of improvement. You are invited to the table, in order that you may be in the way of growing wiser and better. Do you plead, that many, who observe this rite, do not live answerably to their engagements? Then do you come, and set a better example. You will render unspeakable service to the Christian cause, by rescuing it from the imputations,

imputations, to which it has been subjected, by the unworthy conduct of its professors. Do you urge, that you may possibly forget your most solemn engagements, and thus increase your guilt and condemnation? Let me say, the same objection, carried through, would prevent your attendance on any religious institution whatever. Why do you attend public worship? Why do you improve your minds by religious studies? Why do you dedicate your infant offspring to the most high? You must know, that these are virtually a profession of the christian faith; and, unless you practise conformably to this profession, that you must answer for it at another day. You may forget the sacred admonitions, which you hear. You may forget the moral lessons, which you read. And when you have solemnly and publicly dedicated a child to the author of its being, you may neglect to bring it up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The obligations taken on yourselves, by these acts of religion, are as binding as those which rise from christian communion. But if the possibility of behaving unworthily is not urged in the one case, why is it in the other?

No man can reflect on the nature of the human mind, on his obligations to Jesus Christ, on the relation subsisting between him and his fellow-christians, and on the moral tendency of this ordinance, without feeling the fullest conviction, that a devout attendance on it would be for his comfort and advantage. I have reason to believe, that many, whom I now address, can subscribe to this observation.—Having, during a course of many years, commemorated the death of their sacred master, habits of piety, gratitude, and benevolence have been gradually formed. Their attainments in pure and rational religion

religion have been essentially promoted by their obedience to the dying command of the son of God. And, in point of christian virtue, their character is far more splendid, than it would have been, had the table been neglected.

LET me recommend their example. Or, let me refer you to a still more respectable authority. The example of the apostles and first Christians will certainly have weight with all, who profess their religion. In addition to these persuasives, let me remind you of the express command of your great law-giver. Think how graciously he condescended, how divinely he taught, how nobly he suffered. Remember that he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities: that it pleased God to lay on him the iniquities of us all. Call up to view, the various affecting circumstances of his passion. And with mingled sorrow, piety, and gratitude, approach the table. Remember that you are all members of one religious family. At this, and all times, may your hearts overflow with love one to another. So will your prayers be heard, and your thanksgivings accepted, through Jesus Christ, to whom be everlasting honours.



Sermon XXXIX.

Family Worship.

PSALM XCII. 2.

TO SHew FORTH THY LOVING-KINDNESS EVERY MORNING ; AND THY FAITHFULNESS, EVERY NIGHT."

TO form a just idea of the sublime pleasures, and real advantages of devotion, we must have been accustomed to its sacred duties. So transcendent are the joys of piety, and so important the moral influence of its public and private offices, that experience will far surpass the most animated description. It is, however, possible to give some account of the nature, the pleasures, and the effects of true devotion ; and to show how much they lose, who neglect prayer ; and have not God in all their thoughts. That there are too many of this description ; too many who never approach the altar of God ; too many who practically say, " what profit shall we have if we pray unto him," is a most discouraging truth. The public offices of devotion are reluctantly observed ; and those of a private and domestic nature are still more neglected.

THE separation of one day from seven, and its consecration to God and religion, have received the approbation of the wisest and best men. Unbelievers have pronounced it an excellent political regulation ; and upon this principle, they have appeared as advocates

cates for a suspension of labour on the Lord's-day. They have even contributed to the support of public worship, from a conviction that society derived many advantages from the joint devotions and religious intercourse of its members. Christians have acted from superior motives. They have turned aside from their labours and pleasures, and have consecrated themselves to religious duties, because they conceived such an intermission of worldly concerns to be the will of God ; because humanity to the lower creation requires such a portion of time for the re-animation of their spirits ; and because the natural and moral exigencies of man concur in the demand. Influenced by these considerations, they have visited the house of God, and encompassed his altar, in that sacred season, which has taken place of the Jewish sabbath. To the calls of business, and the solicitations of pleasure, they have turned a deaf ear ; because they could not reconcile a compliance with either with their obligations to Jesus Christ, and with the necessity there is, that they, who have any regard to the public morals, should set a good example.

BUT the Lord's-day is not the only season for the offices of piety, nor the church the only place where they are to be performed. Our places of retirement, and our families, should be witnesses of our devotion ; and it should be our constant practice, to " shew forth the loving-kindness of God in the morning ; and his faithfulness, every night." The example of the psalmist inculcates this lesson ; and it is enforced by numberless considerations, some of which will offer themselves in the prosecution of this discourse.

" THE loving-kindness of God, every morning ; and his faithfulness, every night," are matters of ex-

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perience. As often as we rise from our pillows, we must, if we properly reflect, view ourselves objects of his preserving care ; and monuments of his goodness. It is God, who hath made us to lie down in safety. During the defenceless hours of the night, his fatherly arm was under our heads, and his providence, our protection. It was he, who gave sleep to our eyes ; and caused our slumbers to be grateful and refreshing. It was God who preserved our habitations from destruction, and our souls from death. His ever-watchful eye was upon us ; and his almighty arm defended us from every accident, to which our persons, and our substance were exposed. These are truths, against which no reasonable objection can be urged. The doctrine of a particular providence includes all the facts, which I have here stated. They are a just inference from those words of the apostle, "in him we live, move, and have our being."

HENCE the confidence, expressed by good men, in the presence of God during the night season, and the special protection afforded to his creatures in the hour of repose. The psalmist says, "I will lay me down in peace, and sleep ; for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." Again, "I laid me down, and slept ; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me." And addressing himself to Job, Zophar assures him, "thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid." In these passages, we have the sentiments of the wise and good, relative to the subject before us ; and we perceive how much satisfaction they derived from the conviction that the most high is ever awake ; ever present with his creatures ; and when they are least capable of providing for their own safety, that his providence is employed in their protection.

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MERCIES, with which we are familiar, seldom lead up our thoughts to their glorious author. The constant stream of divine goodness flows on unobserved. Hence the necessity of reminding us, that the salvation of every successive night is the work of our heavenly father. The providence of God is as certainly exercised over us, when reclining on our pillow, and composed to rest, as in the most perilous situation. And that our sleep has not terminated in death, is to be ascribed, no less in one case than the other, to his infinite benevolence. The loving-kindness of God is therefore new upon us every morning. And the first beam of light, that meets our eyes, should remind us of him, who is the father of lights ; and from whom cometh down every temporal and spiritual blessing.

BUT the approaching shades of night are not less instructive than the splendor of a new day. If the morning suggests to us the loving-kindness of the Lord, we are reminded of his faithfulness every night. It is not uncommon with oriental writers to ascribe to one attribute that, which arises from the joint operation of one with more of the divine perfections. This is the case in the words before us. The faithfulness of God is singled out, as the proper subject of our evening celebration. But his wisdom, power, and goodness have all been displayed in the course of the day. As often as we retire to rest, we may view ourselves as monuments of his guardian care and protection. His wisdom has guided us amid innumerable dangers : his arm has rescued us from destruction ; his bounty has supplied our wants. Under the guardianship of our heavenly father, we have pursued our lawful business ; and his goodness has blessed the labour of our hands. In our going

going out, and coming in, we have experienced his faithfulness. He has continued to us our reason; and upheld us in its exercise. Our table has been spread with his stores; our cup has been replenished by his munificence; and his invisible, but unremitted energy has caused our garments to be a grateful covering, and our food effectual to our subsistence. That we are alive, when the day is gone; that we have our friends about us; that we are encompassed by our domestic circle; that we have the prospect of resting from our labours, and gaining new spirits against the return of our accustomed duties, are blessings, which must be referred to the God of heaven. Because we do not discern the hand which bestows them, we are not to suppose that they flow from any inferior source.

Thus, my christian friends, do every morning and evening furnish new proofs of the loving-kindness and faithfulness of the Lord. To adopt the language of the inspired poet, we may say, "day unto day uttereth speech: and night unto night showeth knowledge." The beginning and the close of every day testify the benevolent care of the supreme being; and suggest to us the propriety of raising our eyes and voices to the author of all good.

I PROCEED, therefore, to our indispensable obligations to render to God our devout homage at these particular seasons. The psalmist says, it is a good thing to celebrate the divine praises, when so many circumstances concur to remind us of his goodness. In the morning we should approach the God of heaven with reverence and gratitude, acknowledging his loving-kindness, and professing our earnest desire to retain a sense of his mercy through the course of the day. Unfeignedly should we thank him for preserv-
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ing our lives from the evil, which walketh in darkness, and for the renovation of our strength and spirits. That we behold the light, and experience the salvation of another day, we should devoutly ascribe to his forbearance and mercy. The acknowledgment of our obligations to God, should be accompanied with the confession of our unworthiness of his favours. And our devotions should include the most fervent prayer, that we may live answerably to the benefits which we have received, and our obligations to that infinitely benevolent being, who has conferred them upon us. Our preservation from every false and evil way, success in our lawful undertakings, the supply of our wants, and a blessing on those, with whom we are particularly connected, are proper subjects of prayer. When we ask these mercies, and make our acknowledgments for those already conferred, we act in character, as dependent beings. Nature teaches us to begin the day with these expressions of unfeigned gratitude, and with these humble supplications.

BUT, if we celebrate the loving-kindness of God in the morning, we should not forget his faithfulness every night. Before we retire to rest, we are in duty bound to thank him for his mercies; and to commend ourselves to his fatherly care. That another day has been added to our lives; that we have escaped the various accidents to which we are continually exposed; that we have been able to prosecute our temporal concerns; that we have experienced so many comforts and blessings, are proper subjects of thanksgiving. And it should inspire us with the warmest gratitude, if, upon a review of our behaviour, we stand acquitted of any false and dishonourable practices. For it cannot be denied, that
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the preserver of our lives is also the guardian of our innocence. And how great are our obligations to him, through whose kind providence we have not only lived, but lived soberly and virtuously.

We should, likewise, commit ourselves to God, imploring his divine protection, through the night-season. That he would defend us from evil, and grant us the blessing of quiet repose ; that he would favour us with the light of another day, and enable us to renew our labours in health and peace, are petitions, which we may decently prefer. They have the sanction of religion. And offered in his name, who has said, "ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find," they will not be rejected.

Thus have I considered our daily obligations to the best of beings ; the seasons, at which we are particularly reminded of them, and the acts of devotion becoming those seasons. From the time, I proceed to the place, in which these acts should be performed. And, according to the direction of our Saviour, we should pray to our father in secret. The son of God both inculcated and practised this duty. He often retired from his disciples, that he might, without interruption, and with sacred fervour, express his desires to the blessed God. And as he practised, so he taught, "but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet ; and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy father, which is in secret ; and thy father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

THERE is, then, the utmost propriety in private acknowledgments, and private supplications to our bountiful parent. Our place of retirement should be consecrated by our morning and evening devotions. When we rise, we should render our private
homage

homage to him, whose loving-kindness has been our preservation. And previously to our accustomed repose, we should as privately recount his mercies, and ask his protection. Retired from human view, we cannot plead, that we want words to express our wants, or confidence to utter them. The embarrassment experienced in a more public situation, will not prevent the decent and solemn performance of this duty.

A CELEBRATED philosopher of antiquity enjoined upon his disciples, a solemn review of their actions at the commencement and termination of each day. Agreeably to his direction, they repaired singly to some solitary mountain or forest, and there conversed with themselves. The subjects of this conversation were mercies received, and duties to be performed. This was the employment of the morning ; and, thus fortified by meditation, they engaged in the more active duties of the day. As the day began, so it closed with self-examination. And the practice was justified by its effects ; for it produced some of the best characters in the heathen world. The author of this institution was Pythagoras, who lived six hundred years before the birth of our Saviour.

BUT that, which the disciples of this philosopher did in obedience to their master, we ought to do from a principle of respect to Jesus Christ. In conformity to the laws of his religion, and in imitation of his example, we ought to retire for the purposes of self-examination, meditation, and prayer. Steady and persevering in this practice, our piety will be amply rewarded. Doing homage to God, we shall do honour to ourselves, and take the most effectual measures for our improvement.

PRIVATE acknowledgments to the most high, and
private

private supplications for the continuance of his mercies, are not, however, the only duties suggested in the text. Social acts of devotion, particularly those in which a family can engage, are inculcated in the words before us. In every house, where the divine authority of the christian religion is admitted, an altar should be raised; and the morning and evening sacrifice should be offered. This was the constant practice of the primitive Christians; and it must approve itself to the judgment of all, who consider how much stress is laid on devotion by our blessed Saviour. As man is a social being, social worship is accommodated to the principles of his nature; and it is moreover subservient to his pleasure and improvement. Family worship has, therefore, unanswerable arguments in its favour.

BUT as this duty has fallen into general contempt, it may be proper to enlarge on the subject. It is incumbent on every man to promote the best interest of those, whom God has committed to his care. His obligation to feed, clothe, and protect them, is never called in question. But equally unquestionable must be his obligation to cultivate their morals, and form them to wisdom and virtue.

Now the offices of devotion, regularly performed in any family, are highly subservient to these purposes. They tend to confirm those sentiments of piety, and to revive those impressions of the Deity, which would otherwise be effaced by the business or pleasures of life. To rouse the attention, it is necessary to shift the scene. Conversant, as we generally are, with sensible objects, there is the utmost danger of our losing all relish, not to say, all recollection of heavenly objects. But prayer, at stated seasons, will not suffer the mind to be absolutely inattentive to its glorious

glorious author. It will bring his character daily into view. It will force those, who unite in it, to recollect that there is a God. And as far as the recollection will operate as a moral restraint, it will show the importance of this religious duty.

If, then, domestic order be a blessing; if a person, presiding over a family, would have his children dutiful, and the inferior members of his household, obedient; if he would have the small community, of which he has the charge, a credit to him, he will not fail to conduct his dependants, of every description, to the throne of God. It is true, the influence of the world may overrule and defeat the influence of devotion. But it is not less true, that the tendency of such a practice, as I am now recommending, is the religious improvement, and domestic happiness of all who engage in it.

FURTHER—It is not unreasonable to suppose, that the united prayers of a christian family may be attended with a special blessing. The efficacy of prayer, to procure the favours desired, is a doctrine of the gospel. God may see fit, in consequence of united addresses and acknowledgments, to bestow that, which he would otherwise have withheld. "Ask, and receive," is the language of our Saviour. And it is the observation of an inspired apostle, "ye have not, because ye ask not." The immediate efficacy concurs, therefore, with its moral tendency, to enforce this particular office of piety.

You perceive, then, how reasonable it is in itself, that the altar should blaze with daily offerings; and that private and domestic devotion should kindle the flame. And ought not your convictions to influence your practice? Ought not every man, who believes in a God, and acknowledges a saviour, to

approach the former, in the name, and through the mediation of the latter ; to express his gratitude with fervour, and his wants with humility ? Can a Christian reconcile it to his conscience, to his reason, to his religious principles, to suffer one day to pass without raising his thoughts to heaven ; and doing homage to his benefactor ? Why should any man be ashamed to testify his reverence of God ; his gratitude, his submission, his confidence in the divine government, and his hopes from the divine favour ? Why should any person be ashamed to repair to the best of beings, for mercies, which he only can bestow ? We need no inducements to ask of our earthly parents, those things which are convenient for us : why, then, should we need so many persuasions to express our wants to our father who is in heaven ? We thank our earthly benefactors : and why should we not give thanks to God, to whom we are under so many obligations ? Why should we be ashamed of religion, or any of its duties or offices ? Among the heathen, princes, heroes, and statesmen, did not blush to do homage to those whom they esteemed gods. And shall Christians, shall any, who believe the gospel, be backward in rendering those spiritual sacrifices, which the gospel requires ? It is either a very false modesty, or a very great coldness to religion, or a very false view of it, which has produced such a neglect of family devotion.

To those who are convinced of the truth, and who feel a reverence for Christianity, let me warmly recommend this, and every office of piety. Say with the psalmist, "every day will I bless thee ; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever." By your practice show, that you are sensible of the "loving-kindness of God in the morning, and his faithfulness every

every night ;" and that you esteem the daily celebration of his goodness a becoming, and an honourable exercise of your rational powers. By such a steady discharge of the offices of devotion, your faith will be confirmed, and your religious principles will be kept in exercise. You will find an increasing pleasure in all the duties of religion. And you will be qualified to unite with superior beings, in celebrating the divine praises, when the distinction of day and night, morning and evening, shall be no more.

Sermon XL.

Funeral Occasion.

ECCLESIASTES XII. 5.

"MAN GOETH TO HIS LONG HOME ; AND THE
MOURNERS GO ABOUT THE STREETS."

SCARCELY does an object present itself among the works of nature, or an event take place in the course of divine providence, from which, if properly disposed, we may not learn a lesson of wisdom. It is the privilege of man to be able to make useful reflections on every thing which occurs. And it is the honour of some, to become wiser and better by every dispensation, whether merciful or afflictive ;
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and by every vicissitude, whether in their own circumstances or those of their neighbour.

BUT though all nature is full of instruction, yet there are scenes and places, particularly favourable to moral improvement. There are events, which deeply affect the heart. There are objects, in which wisdom loudly cries; and understanding utters a most commanding voice; objects which teach us what we are, and what we may expect; objects which proclaim this mortifying truth, that we "dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust; and which are crushed before the moth. You will easily conceive, that I now allude to the scene drawn in the text: "Man goeth to his long home; and the mourners go about the streets."

THESE words are admirably introduced by the wise moralist. His discourse begins with an earnest recommendation of early piety. To give weight to his counsels and exhortations, he carries his hearer forward to a time, when he would lose all relish for the inferior pleasures of sense. The various infirmities and miseries of old age are then described.—And, at length, the grave is displayed; and the dead are represented as receiving the last offices of their surviving friends. Every part of the discourse is worthy of our attention. It cannot be perused without admiration of the author; and without some very solemn reflections on human life, and the inevitable destiny of man.

To turn this fragment of ancient wisdom to our advantage, I shall inquire, how we ought to be affected; what inferences we should draw; what observations we should make; what resolutions we should form: in a word, what truths we should learn, when we pay a visit to the grave; and accompany the mourners about the streets.

FIRST

FIRST—Objects and scenes of so melancholy a cast naturally remind us of the introduction of death, and its universal dominion over the human kind. The believer in divine revelation is carried back to the time, when one fatal act of disobedience exposed the offenders to the righteous displeasure of God ; and subjected their posterity to labour, sorrow, and death. The sentence, “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” will be recollected at such a moment. And the serious mind will unavoidably fall into the following reflections : How mysterious are the dispensations of God ; how inscrutable his measures, in respect to the human race ! Scarcely were their first parents introduced to life, before they forfeited that blessing. And how many evils have flowed from their presumption ! How many briars and thorns have infested the earth, in testimony of the divine displeasure at moral evil ! How much toil have the children of men endured ; how many pains have they felt ; how many tears have they shed ; how many terrors have they experienced ; and how many triumphs have they furnished to the great destroyer ! Infinite wisdom cannot err ; and infinite goodness cannot do wrong. Still, to human view, it must appear mysterious, that one act of disobedience should subject the whole rational creation to vanity. The fact, however, is incontestable : Revelation, therefore, must come to our relief ; and the event must justify the divine proceedings towards the race of men, and their offending progenitors. Is it not conceivable, that the passing remains of a neighbour or friend, the attending mourners, and the slow procession, may awaken reflections of this nature in a mind accustomed to religious speculations ? Do I not, at this time, address some, who have

have entertained these thoughts? Have you not all, at certain moments, been affected in the manner which I have briefly described?

SECONDLY—The last offices paid to the deceased, naturally call our reflections to the surviving friends; and lead us to consider the loss sustained, and the misery produced, by such a bereavement. It is not always the case, that the most useful are continued longest in this world. So far from it, we often behold the most active members of society suddenly removed; and length of days conferred on those, who live to no valuable purpose. How often is the parent taken from a numerous and dependent family? How often do we discern among the victims of death, the child, whose industry supported, and whose filial piety was the consolation of an aged parent? How often do the benefactors of the poor and miserable find an early grave? How often are the bands of a strict and virtuous friendship broken by death? How often does the godly man cease, whilst the impious are spared; and whilst the workers of iniquity are left to prosecute their wicked designs, how often do the faithful fall from among the children of men! What is more common, than to see this apparent inversion of the order of providence? It is a remark, which every person of serious observation has had frequent occasion to make.

BEHOLDING, then, the doors of the tomb displayed, and the mourners going about the streets, who would not advert to the sorrows endured by surviving friends? Who would not think, with generous commiseration, of the sighs, which have proceeded from their bosoms; of the tears, which have fallen from their eyes; of the anguish, which is rending their hearts! Who would not call up to view all the melancholy

melancholy circumstances connected with this event? And, partaking of the sorrows of those, who are bewailing their loss, who would not find, that it is more improving to visit the house of mourning, than the house of feasting? Who would not assent to the sage observation, that sorrow is better than laughter? Who would not believe, that by the sadness of the countenance the heart may be made better?

THIRDLY—When man goeth to his long home, and the mourners present themselves in the streets, how obvious the reflection, that yet a little while, and we must lie down, and awake not till the heavens be no more! The death of others is a solemn intimation of our own mortality. When we see a Christian, whom we revered; a friend, whom we loved; a neighbour, with whom we had been intimate; or, indeed, any, with whom we once had the slightest acquaintance, committed to the dust, it is very natural to make a transition to our own approaching fate. The mind is carried forward to a time, when this earthly house of our tabernacle shall be shaken; when the aching head, and fainting heart, shall announce our danger; when the skilful physician shall confess the vanity of his science;—when our weeping friends and relatives shall anxiously surround our bed, with tears resign us to our fate, or, with prayers, implore our recovery; when the heart shall dictate, though the tongue be unable to express, “Lord Jesus, receive our spirit;” when some friendly hand shall close our eyes; when our neighbours and associates shall kindly assemble to perform the last offices; and when our remains shall be covered with the earth, there to see corruption. These scenes do not present themselves to us in the walks of business; or when hurried round in the whirl

whirl of dissipation. We must be put in mind of our own mortality by the funeral procession, or a solemn visit to the grave.

BUT, when once the thoughts have taken this direction, will not the preparation, necessary for our own change, be naturally suggested? Will not every serious person commune with his own heart, and say, must I become the same spectacle, which is now before my eyes? Must I also go the way, whence I shall not return? Must these eyes be closed in night; must all my purposes be broken off, even the thoughts of my heart? Must I go to my long home; and have no more any portion forever in any thing, which is done under the sun? Then, "teach me, O my creator, so to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom." May I feel an habitual conviction, that this is only an introduction to existence. Born to die, may I constantly keep in view my last end. And as becomes a Christian, may I have my conversation in heaven, whence I look for the Lord Jesus, who died that I might live; and who became mortal, that I might put on immortality.

FOURTHLY—The interment of a friend will, if we properly reflect, lead us to set a high value on the gospel; and to esteem its communications, respecting futurity, as an unspeakable blessing. To abolish death, and bring life and immortality to light, was an honour reserved for the son of God. His benevolent visit to this world, and his triumphs over the grave, have ascertained the certainty of a future state; and have furnished convincing evidence, that the dissolution of the body is not the extinction of our being. We are assured, that the souls of the righteous are in the hands of the Lord; and that he will restore that, which is committed to him, at the great day.

AND

AND how grateful should we be for this discovery, when we are called to assume the habit of mourners ; and to perform their melancholy office ? If we had reason to think, that there would be no release from the confinement of the grave, we might innocently indulge our sorrows ; and even refuse to be comforted. By what arguments could our spirits be supported, if without hope beyond the hour of death ? But eternal thanks to the father of mercies, we are not left in this despairing condition. The gospel has revealed to us the path of life. The son of God has risen from the dead, to satisfy us, that the doctrine of a resurrection is not incredible.— And inasmuch as he now lives and reigns, we may rest assured, that he will raise us up at the last day. Philosophy may object ; but the gospel bears down every objection.

How welcome, then, that revelation, which presents these prospects ; and supports our trembling hearts with these discoveries ? What a friend to the wretched ; what a cordial to the mourner ! How must it exalt our ideas of the christian religion, to find it so full of consolation ! And with what pleasure must we repair to that sacred volume, in which we read, “ as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The assurance that “ the hour is coming, when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the son of God, and come forth,” must dispose us to weep as though we wept not ; and must reconcile us to bereavements, which would otherwise be insupportable.

AND when the number of our friends is diminished by the ravages of death, do we not sometimes find relief in these reflections ? Are they not excited, when we behold the house appointed for all the liv-

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ing ; and see the mourners in the streets ? Can the gloomy objects before our eyes, prevent our thoughts from taking their flight to other worlds, and dwelling on brighter scenes ? No : it is natural for minds seriously disposed to rise from earth to heaven ; and to make an excursion from the mansions of the dead, to the glorious mansions provided by the Saviour ; and where he is now waiting to receive us.

FIFTHLY—When we attend the remains of a friend to the long home, and unfeignedly bewail our loss, we should derive consolation from this thought, that no such bereavement will imbitter our future existence. The joys of heaven are not, like the inferior pleasures of this state, liable to interruption. Far from it ; they are pure as the source from which they flow ; and lasting as that being, who has promised them to the faithful and obedient. The heavenly happiness is thus represented by the prophet : “ And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as chrystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month ; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse.” In another place we read, “ and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain ; for the former things have passed away.” It is a certain doctrine of the gospel, that heaven is a region of pure and uninterrupted happiness. So explicit is revelation on this subject, that he, who believes the gospel, must be persuaded that the sincere and obedient Christian has nothing to fear beyond this life.

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When he joins his departed friends, he will dread no separation. The second death will have no power, either over him, or his associates in blessedness.

AND is not this a most consoling reflection to those, who are paying the last attention, which friendship can require? How natural to a sincere and affectionate mourner to say with the psalmist, "why art thou cast down, O my soul; why art thou disquieted within me?" How obvious the thought, that this is a vale of tears; and that it is necessary our hopes should be disappointed, and our souls occasionally pierced with many sorrows? And how comforting the assurance, that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed! Is it possible that we should be greatly moved by any misfortune, which may overtake us; is it possible that any loss should make a lasting impression on our spirits; is it conceivable that we should faint under any adversity, when we are certain, that present evils are temporary, but the future good, in reserve for us, eternal!

SIXTHLY—When contemplating the objects exhibited in the text, it is useful to inquire, what may be learned from the patient sufferings, the active virtues, or any of the amiable qualities of the person, whom, in this world, we shall see no more. Was there an habitual preparation for this great and awful change? Was death desired, or was it dreaded? Were the sufferings, previous to it, endured with firmness and resignation? Was there a rational ground to hope that death would be unspeakable gain? These inquiries, if answered to our satisfaction, show what resolutions we should form, when attending our friends to the silent tomb. We should resolve to be followers of them, as far as they were
followers

followers of Jesus Christ. We should determine, with the divine assistance, to bear affliction with their temper ; and to meet death with their confidence. In a word, if we have reason to hope, that, through faith and patience, they inherit the promises, we should express our regards, not by lamenting their departure, but by copying that which was excellent in their character.

FINALLY—As often as we see a friend going to his long home, and observe the mourners in the streets, we should be reminded, that we also are pilgrims and strangers ; should inquire what progress we have made in our journey ; and should ask our hearts, whether we should be rejoiced or alarmed, if assured that the hour of our dissolution had come. What can be so interesting to us, as a preparation for death, whenever it shall please God to remove us from this state of trial ? It was the happiness of the apostle to be able to say, “ I am now ready to be offered ; and the time of my departure is at hand : I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but to all those who love his appearing.” May a firm persuasion of the truth and excellency of the christian religion, and a consciousness that we have earnestly endeavoured to walk according to its rules, fortify our minds against the fears of death ; and enable us to triumph over the king of terrors. May every instance of mortality, of which we are witnesses, lead us to contemplate our own dissolution. And more especially, when any of our relatives and connexions ; any, who formed a part of our domestic circle ; any, whose study it was
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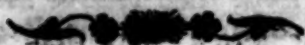
to promote our interest and happiness ; any, who assumed and deserved the name of friend ; any, whom we ought to remember with affection and gratitude ; when any of this description are consigned to the grave, we should consider that our days are an hand-breadth, and our age nothing before God ; that we must soon follow the objects, whose departure we deplore ; and that we must appear with them before a righteous judge.

AND are there not any present, to whom these counsels are applicable ? Are there not persons in this assembly, who, called to mourning by the providence of God, need every consolation, which religion can give ? To such, let me say, "in this world, we are destined to tribulation : " but "be of good cheer, Jesus Christ has overcome the world." If he learned obedience by the things which he suffered, how much more do we need this salutary discipline ! How many are our errors ? How numerous our faults ? How inveterate our perverseness ; and how aggravated our transgressions ? How many moral disorders have we all to be cured ? And how far are we from the kingdom of heaven ? The imperfection of our characters will justify the discipline of God ; and show us the necessity of patience and submission.

WHEREFORE, let those, who mourn, remember the design of human misery ; and suppress every hard thought of that being, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. Let them dwell with rapture on that day, which will clear up the dispensations of providence ; and force this conviction on every mind, that nothing can be wrong under the government of God. Let a more intimate acquaintance with God and religion, with heaven and with duty, derive importance from our present sufferings.

Then

Then shall we know by experience, that sorrow is better than laughter ; that scenes of distress are more improving than scenes of festivity ; that we have learned wisdom at the tomb, which contains the sleeping dust of our friends ; and that the end of all has been properly laid to heart !



*The following were the two last SERMONS, which
Dr. CLARKE delivered.*

Sermon XLI.

The Word of Truth.

EPHESIANS I. 13.

—“THE WORD OF TRUTH, THE GOSPEL OF YOUR
SALVATION.”

IN all the writings of the evangelists and apostles, I know not where to find a better definition of the christian religion, than in the words to which I have invited your attention. They remind us both of the foundation, and the design of the gospel.— They suggest, that it is not an ingenious fiction, to which our faith and submission are required. And they awaken our gratitude, by reminding us of the good tidings contained in the gospel, and the benevolent end, for which it was communicated to mankind.

kind. "The word of truth, the gospel of salvation," are terms, which express every thing honourable in respect to the system, and interesting to those who receive it.

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour to illustrate this brief definition of the christian religion; and shall then point out the duties implied in it.

"The gospel of our salvation" are terms most happily chosen by the apostle, to lead us to just ideas of the christian dispensation. The literal meaning of the term, gospel, is good news. And what news can be more welcome to the human kind, than the information conveyed by the Saviour, and preserved in the volume of revelation? What better tidings could we hear, than that there is forgiveness for the penitent, knowledge for the ignorant, assistance for the weak, comfort for the distressed, a resurrection for all who are subject to death; and for the obedient, a glorious immortality? These promises, and this information, being contained in the gospel, is not a term, implying good news, the best, which could have been devised, to unfold the nature and object of the christian institution?

BUT how is this institution the gospel of our salvation? To this I answer, first, the gospel is a clear discovery of the possibility of salvation; and an assurance, that so great a blessing is actually provided for us? Does salvation include the forgiveness of sin? The gospel abounds with promises of pardon. To what part of the christian revelation can we turn, without meeting with this animating truth? Can we consult the discourses of our Saviour, and be ignorant that there is mercy with his heavenly father; and that it will be exercised towards all, who unfeignedly repent? Can we listen to an apostle, without

out learning the efficacy of repentance? Can we attend to facts recorded in the sacred pages, and not find instances of pardon actually dispensed? Is there any thing in the writings of the evangelists and apostles, any parable, any expression, from which it may be inferred that God is inexorable? By no means: it is as clear as promises, and as facts can make it, that there is forgiveness for the chief of sinners.

SALVATION implying, therefore, the remission of sins, however numerous and aggravated, we must admit the definition in the text. The gospel of Christ is, in this view, good tidings of salvation. And for this reason, the birth of its founder was announced in these majestic strains: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." For the same reason, the heavenly host were heard, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men." And conformably to the benevolent design of his religion, the Saviour himself said to his disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear: for verily, I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things, which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things, which ye hear, and have not heard them." The same views of the gospel led the apostle to exclaim, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."

If there were no ground to hope that our sins would be forgiven, the horrors of our situation would exceed all description. Every man must be sensible, when he consults his own conscience, that his works have not been perfect before God. So far from it,

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we are all guilty in our own eyes ; and are convinced, that ruin must be inevitable, if the exercise of mercy were inconsistent with the character of God, and the principles of his government. How deeply, then, must we feel ourselves interested in the promises of pardon, and the offers of reconciliation, which abound in the gospel ! Is there one present, who does not esteem it a matter of joy, that pardon may be obtained, and the penal consequences of moral evil averted ? If any thing can awaken a sentiment of gratitude in the human mind, it must be a discovery, that God is not implacable ; and if any thing can fix a transcendent value on the gospel, it is the glorious truth now under consideration.

As the forgiveness, so a deliverance from the reigning power of sin, is provided by the gospel.—The terms, therefore, used in the text, are very applicable to it. The gospel assures us, that “ sin shall not reign in our mortal bodies, that we should obey it in the lusts thereof.” It promises a “ deliverance from the bondage of corruption, and ensures the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” Unless it be our own fatal choice to continue under the dominion of our lusts and passions, the gospel informs us that we may recover our freedom ; and may bring all our animal propensities into subjection to the laws of reason, and the restraints of conscience. It sets before us instances of such a glorious conquest.—And it gives us clearly to understand, that measures are in operation, which will terminate in the reduction of moral evil, and the most extensive empire of piety and virtue.

In this view of the christian dispensation, it is, therefore, the gospel of our salvation. But, its just claim to this denomination will be still more appa-

rent, if we consider, that it not only reveals our deliverance from the power of sin, but furnishes the means of accomplishing this deliverance. The gospel points out the criminal practices, and all the guilty excesses, which we are to avoid. And it prescribes rules of conduct, which, if observed, will produce a thorough reformation, and the highest improvement of our nature. To cure us of impiety, in every form and degree, it reveals to us the character and government of God ; and teaches us how to behave towards a being possessed of his perfections, standing in his relation, and exercising his authority. To cleanse us from all unrighteousness, it states, with clearness, the duties which we owe to each other ; prohibits every species of wrong ; and recommends justice, mercy, and truth, by arguments which carry conviction. To deliver us from private vices and impurities, it shows us what they are, and to what they tend ; and, at the same time, it displays, in the most striking colours, the opposite virtues. In the gospel, there is all the information necessary for the detection of our faults, the most secret of them not excepted ; and there is every direction and motive, requisite to the formation of a good character. We have prohibitions suited to every temptation, and precepts accommodated to our circumstances, desires, and intentions. In a word, if we want religious instruction, we have it in the gospel. If we want motives and arguments in favour of sobriety, righteousness, and piety, we have them in the christian system. If we want any inducement to forsake our sins, and to do that which is lawful and right, we have it in the discourses of our blessed Saviour. As the gospel declares the forgiveness of sins, so it announces our deliverance from them.

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And as it reveals to us the conquest of our rebellious passions, so it provides the means of obtaining this glorious victory. How justly, then, is it defined, *the gospel of our salvation!*

To proceed—A deliverance from ignorance and error, is included in the blessing conferred by the christian dispensation. We have minds to be enlightened, as well as hearts to be reformed. A state of religious blindness is to be deprecated as an uncomfortable state, as a state of debasement, as a state most unfavourable to our future destination. To be impressed with the many evils, and the ignominy of it, we have only to turn our eyes towards the heathen. They were ignorant of the true character of God, and of the nature of his government; they were ignorant of his holy will, of the necessity and consequences of obedience, and of their future existence. Their conceptions of invisible agents were absurd in the extreme; and on all moral and religious subjects, the utmost confusion reigned in their understandings.

THEIR doubts and fears were equal to their errors. Unacquainted with God, and his direction of all events, they were often the slaves of their gloomy apprehensions. They saw things through a medium, which clothed them with terror. And to avert expected evil, they frequently had recourse to measures as preposterous as their fears. In the same state of uncertainty and wretchedness, should we have been, if the light of the glorious gospel of Christ had not shone upon the world. Involved in thick darkness, we should have had no just idea of an overruling providence, no confidence in a wise direction of events, no hope that all things would work together for good. We should have paid our homage to beings, who

who had no existence, except it were in the calendar of superstition. We should have been stained with all the crimes, and degraded by all the superstitious practices, of which we read with so much horror and disgust. That we are not, therefore, in this state of debasement, must be ascribed to the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation.

AGAIN—The blessing, which is under consideration, includes deliverance from the power of the grave. "By one man, sin came into the world; and death by sin; and so death has passed upon all men." But the gospel reveals a deliverance from death; and "brings life and immortality to light." We learn from the christian revelation, that "all, who are in their graves, shall hear the voice of the son of God, and come forth." The doctrine of a general resurrection is asserted in the plainest terms. Admitting the gospel to be the word of truth, we are as certain of returning to life, as of yielding to the stroke of death; as certain that we shall rise from the dust, as that we shall descend to it.

THIS discovery being made in the fullest manner by the gospel, it is very pertinently styled *the gospel of our salvation*. And this doctrine should lead us to set the highest value on the christian system. For how interesting is the discovery, that death is not utter destruction? how valuable the information, that though we die, we shall live again? how joyful the assurance, that we shall be released from the prison of the grave, and shall behold death swallowed up in victory! This is such a great salvation, as must excite the warmest gratitude towards God; and inspire us with the highest reverence of that gospel, of which it is an essential doctrine.

A DELIVERANCE from ignorance and error, from
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guilt, from the dominion of sin, and from death, is not, however, a complete enumeration of all the blessings included in the term salvation. It implies our preservation from the wrath to come, and the enjoyment of eternal glory and happiness in the kingdom of heaven. The gospel clearly sets forth a state of consummate and unceasing blessedness, which is to succeed the general resurrection. It declares, that a patient continuance in well-doing will ensure to us that blessedness. And to give us the most exalted idea of our future condition, a variety of figures are employed by the sacred writers; and all of them calculated to make a deep impression on the mind. Though we know not what, in all respects, our condition will be, yet we are certain, from the language of revelation, that our happiness will be uninterrupted, will be continually increasing, will be everlasting: that it will be composed of every joy, which piety and benevolence, which the friendship of God, the presence of Jesus Christ, which the society of saints and angels, can furnish.

Thus have I attempted a description of the salvation revealed in the gospel. But as it points out the blessing, I observe, in the second place, that it shows through whom, and on what principle it is bestowed. And on this account, the christian system is the gospel of our salvation. As the true source of all we now enjoy, or expect hereafter, we are referred to the grace or benevolence of God. His love to the world, his forbearance, his compassion, his disposition to communicate happiness, must be regarded as the foundation of all our hopes. According to the testimony of divine revelation, we are saved by grace, in every sense, in which the term salvation can be used. Through the grace of God, our sins are forgiven;

given; the penal consequences of them averted; and the power of them broken. Through his grace, we are delivered from the prison of death, and made subjects of a blessed immortality. To the joys of heaven, we have no title, but that which we derive from the pure benevolence of the Deity. By his grace, we are both naturally and morally what we are; and it is through his grace, we have any expectations here or hereafter.

FURTHER—The gospel informs us, not only whence our salvation proceeds, but through whom it is derived to mankind. It exhibits Jesus Christ as an eminent sufferer; and it represents his death as essentially connected with our salvation. The language of the gospel is, that he died for our sins; that he suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Jesus Christ is styled, a propitiation for our sins; and we are said to obtain redemption through his blood. Upon this principle, the apostle professes to glory in the cross of Christ.—Hence, also, those exulting strains, “He that spared not his son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” These words ascribe a peculiar efficacy to the death of Christ; and show that it had great influence in securing to us the forgiveness of our sins, acceptance with God, and eternal salvation.

FINALLY—The gospel will appear to be accurately defined, and justly represented in the text, if we reflect, that, as it reveals salvation to mankind, and points out its source and moral ground, so it is the means, by which we are rendered capable of that blessing.

blessing. By the gospel, accompanied with the divine influence, we are made new creatures. It is the instrument, by which God changes our hearts, purifies our affections, regulates our desires, governs our actions, and thus trains us up for a state of immortal felicity. It is, therefore, at once the discovery of salvation, and the mean of putting us in possession of it. No one will deny, that we must be holy before we can be happy ; that evil habits must be subdued, and good habits formed in us ; that we must have the temper of heaven, before we can relish the joys of it ; that in order to see God, we must be partakers of his nature. But, if we examine the gospel, we shall be satisfied, that, in the hand of God, it is adequate to all these effects. It is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among those who are sanctified. It is able to make us holy in heart and life ; and to fill us with all the fruits of righteousness, which are, through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God. It is, therefore, the " power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth."

HAVING thus endeavoured to illustrate and confirm the representation in the text, I shall conclude with exhibiting the duties implied in it. In the first place, it becomes us to be unfeignedly grateful to God for this unspeakable blessing. We have, indeed, innumerable testimonies of the divine goodness.— Every day brings with it some proof, that God is our father and benefactor. But the gospel is a favour of so peculiar a nature ; it reveals such blessings ; it contains such promises ; it gives us such a view of the character and designs of God ; it presents such an example ; it opens such prospects ; it brings such aid ; it stands on such a foundation ; that we cannot overvalue it ; that we cannot exceed in our expressions

professions of gratitude to the father of lights, from whom came down this good and perfect gift. In our estimation, let it always rank among the greatest blessings. And let us ever esteem it a distinguishing privilege, that we were born under the light of the christian dispensation; and that we still retain the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation.

SECONDLY—Whilst we profess to value, we should be careful to study the christian oracles. God has given us powers, which ought to be exercised, as well on religious subjects, as those of an inferior nature. And what subject has a better claim to our attention, than the will of God, and the designs of his goodness? Is it not of infinite importance to mankind, to ascertain the real character of a being, in whom they live and move, and who will determine their everlasting condition? Is it not of the last moment, to be apprized of the terms of his friendship, and the consequences of his displeasure? If salvation be offered, is it not all-important to us to know what we shall do to be saved? On these heads, the gospel is the only authentic source of information. It ought, therefore, to be consulted with impartiality, and studied with diligence. By those, who make a public profession, it ought to be read daily; and to be read with this view, that their minds may be still more enlightened; that good principles may be confirmed; and that their course of action may be still more conformable to the will of God; that they may be better able to resist temptation, and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

THE christian system being the gospel of our salvation, it follows, in the last place, that we should concur with the end of that dispensation, and not defeat

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it by our disobedience. We are not to imagine that salvation will, if I may use so strong a term, be forced upon us ; or that eternal life and happiness are an unconditional gift. Far from it : if we have blessings to expect, we have duties to perform. To enjoy the happiness proposed in the gospel, we must add obedience to it. The lives, which we live in the flesh, must be by faith in the son of God. We must submit to the prohibitions of the gospel ; must follow its directions ; must listen to its counsels ; must be awed by its threatenings ; must be animated by its promises ; must, in a word, be practical Christians, in order to obtain the Christian's reward. In this world, we must be saved from every false and evil way, from every vile affection, and criminal habit, in order to obtain salvation with joy in the world to come.

AMONG the means, provided by infinite wisdom, for our religious improvement, is the ordinance of the Lord's-supper. By this institution, we commemorate the death of Jesus Christ, and give ourselves up to him, and to each other. We, moreover, declare to the world, that we are not ashamed of the gospel ; but glory in it, as a most wise and gracious expedient to bring us to God, and to fit us for heaven.— May our celebration of it, this day, be attended with a blessing. And may we at length be made heirs of salvation, through Jesus Christ, to whom be everlasting praises.

Sermon XLII.

On the Imitation of the Divine Holiness.

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 I PETER, I. 15, 16.

“BUT AS HE, WHICH HATH CALLED YOU, IS HOLY, SO BE YE HOLY IN ALL MANNER OF CONVERSATION; BECAUSE IT IS WRITTEN, BE YE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

IT is a doctrine of natural religion, that God is perfectly good; and it is a precept of divine revelation, that we should be “followers of him, as dear children.” The gods, whom the heathen worshipped, were grossly immoral. Pride, jealousy, revenge, and lust, were openly imputed to them. And many of their actions were such as would bring a lasting scandal on any human character. To the poets we are indebted for this information. They freely told, and the people sincerely believed, the immoralities of their gods. And with such examples before them, we cannot wonder at the prevailing wickedness, which disgraced the heathen world.

BUT far other is the object proposed to our imitation. The being, whom we invoke by the name of God, and reverence as our maker, may be considered as an assemblage of all perfection. He is infinitely holy, just, and good. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; and he cannot look on sin but with abhorrence. Hence it is, with great propriety, that we are exhorted to be followers of him.

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For nothing can lead to higher degrees of virtue and purity, than an habitual imitation of him, in whom all natural and moral perfections are united.

THESE remarks may serve as a proper introduction to the words of the text. St. Peter knew the importance of a holy and exemplary life. He knew, that, without purity on the part of its professors, Christianity must suffer. And he was as sensible, that, in order to partake of the glory and blessedness of God, men must be partakers of his divine nature. He, therefore, reminds his fellow-christians of their religious obligations. And, from the holiness of God, he takes occasion to recommend holiness in all manner of conversation. "As obedient children," says he, "not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. *But as he, which hath called you, is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; for it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy.*"

My design, in this discourse, is, in the first place, to consider the absolute purity of God. And, secondly, to propose it as an object of human imitation. This will take up the apostle's argument; and lead to some useful reflections.

FIRST—We are reminded of the absolute holiness of that God, by whom we have been rescued from a state of darkness; and called to the knowledge and practice of true religion. The supreme being is infinitely removed from every kind and degree of moral evil whatever. And this is what we are to understand by *holiness*, when the word is used with reference to God. There is, indeed, an inferior sense, which is sometimes affixed to this word. A mere separation from common use, is its undoubted signification in some parts of the scripture. Accordingly, we read of the holy mountain, the holy temple, the
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holy vessels, and a holy priesthood. But, when God is styled holy, the meaning of the expression is, that he is absolutely free from all moral defilement : that, in his nature, there is nothing, which bears the least resemblance to injustice, cruelty, envy, hatred, revenge, impatience, malice, unfaithfulness, or falsehood : so far from it, that he is essentially, and eternally possessed of the opposite qualities ; and that they constitute the glory and excellency of his character. Thus it appears, that holiness is a general term ; and that, in this term, is comprehended every thing morally good. When, therefore, we speak of the supreme being in this language, we pronounce him absolutely without sin, but possessed of every perfection.

AND this is the true idea of God. This conception ought we to form, if we give credit to the holy scriptures. They always represent him as the high and holy one ; and celebrate his transcendent purity in the most exalted strains. The angels of heaven are introduced, not only as spectators of the divine holiness, but as doing homage to it in this magnificent language : "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." Such is the character of God, in the view of his heavenly attendants. And the same honourable conceptions of him have been entertained by the enlightened part of mankind. Moses says, "the Lord is a God of truth, and without iniquity ; just and right is he." And it is the language of Elihu, "far be it from God, that he should do wickedness ; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render to him ; and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty

mighty pervert judgment." The psalmist, likewise, characterizes the blessed God in terms as just and exalted. "Thou art not a God, that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity." But, "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance be- holdeth the upright." I might produce many other passages of scripture, in which the most absolute moral rectitude is ascribed to God. But it is evident to all, who are acquainted with the sacred pages, that holiness in God, as opposed to every moral imperfection, is an unquestionable doctrine of revelation. To this great and solemn truth, the ears of the Israelites were always familiarized. And our Saviour, and the apostles, never failed to teach it to their followers.

BUT we are not wholly indebted to the scriptures for this information. That the governor of the world is a being of infinite purity, may be inferred from the constitution of human nature. We are all conscious of a principle of moral discernment; and, as we distinguish between good and evil, that we unanimously approve the one, and condemn the other. In short, imperfect as our nature is, yet there is a degree of purity in that part of the human species, who have felt the power of the gospel, and been created anew by Jesus Christ unto good works. But, it is an established maxim, that "whatever excellency there is in any effect, the same must be still more eminently in its cause." To this truth, the mind readily and firmly assents. Since, then, God made us; since he implanted in us a moral faculty; and since, under his guidance and direction, we do really attain to a degree of holiness, we may conclude, that he is holy in the most eminent sense of the word.

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The reproof uttered by the psalmist, will illustrate this argument. "Understand, ye brutish among the people, and, ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?" From the things, which are made, we justly infer the eternal power and Godhead. From the marks of wisdom, which universally appear, we infer that God is wise. From the bounties hourly conferred on us, we conclude that God is good. And from our capacity of moral rectitude, and the degree of holiness, to which we really attain, we justly argue, that the being, from whom we derived our powers, and on whom we depend for their exercise, must be absolutely pure.—Otherwise, we fall into the gross absurdity of admitting an effect without an adequate cause.

FINALLY—We argue that God is holy from the moral government, which he hath established over the world. There is an evident connexion between virtue and happiness, and between vice and misery. The greatest good, which can happen to mankind, and the greatest evils, which can overtake them, may be traced up to their moral conduct. By a course of obedience, they have essentially improved their present condition. And they have rendered themselves unspeakably wretched by their depravity and guilt. It is true, some bad men appear to be happy; and some good ones appear to be miserable. But, I am now speaking of the general tendency of virtue and vice. And if the former, according to the established course of things, is productive of happiness, and the latter of misery, we have sure indications of the character of God. It is plain, that a righteous administration is begun. It is evident, that the maker

ker and governor of the world is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, even with indifference, much less with approbation. In short, it is certain, that God is so eminently and transcendently pure, that Eliphaz might well say, "the heavens are not clean in his sight; and he charged his angels with folly." The words, it is acknowledged, are highly figurative; but they excite no more than a just idea of the divine purity.

HAVING thus considered the holiness of God, I now proceed, secondly, to propose it as an object of human imitation. "*Be ye holy,*" saith the supreme being, "*for I am holy.*" From reason and scripture it is clear, that we ought to aim at a resemblance of God, in all the imitable perfections of his nature. Thus, because he is just, we should endeavour to conform all our actions to the eternal and unalterable laws of righteousness. Because he is merciful, we should exercise compassion. Because he is good, we should cultivate a principle of universal benevolence. And inasmuch as he is holy, we should endeavour to be "holy in all manner of conversation." In his moral perfections only, can we ever rise to a resemblance of the Deity. In the exercise of his supreme power, in the extent of his unerring knowledge, and in the depth of his unfathomable wisdom, God is not proposed to any created being as an object of imitation. But goodness, justice, truth, mercy, and holiness are moral qualities, of which we can form some idea. And, in these respects, we should ardently desire to be like the author of our being.

It is certain, however, that, even in these moral excellencies, we must be followers of God at an unmeasurable distance. Though created after him in righteousness and true holiness, yet we must fall infinitely

initely short of him in purity. He only is absolutely without spot or blemish. The most exalted spirit cannot, without blasphemy, compare the rectitude of his nature with that of the Deity. And, against the best Christian on earth, it may be alleged, that in many things he offends, and in all falls short of his duty. It is true, some enthusiasts have pretended to rival the Almighty in this comprehensive attribute. They have complimented themselves, not merely with a resemblance, but an equality with God, in point of holiness. Such self-deceivers there were in the days of St. John; and they are pointedly reproved in the following words: "If we say, we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." But we need not labour to expose this error. Such vanity is not the fault of the present age. We are all sufficiently ready to own the distance between God and ourselves. And it is our prevailing fault, that we do not aim at a resemblance of him, so far as he is a pattern to his creatures.

THE duty, prescribed in the text, is to be "holy in all manner of conversation." God is absolutely pure. And inasmuch as we bear his image, it should be our ambition to keep ourselves unspotted of the world. We should, in the first place, aim at purity of heart. "Keep thy heart," says the wise man, "with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." And our Saviour says, "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." It should be our great care to subdue all irregular desires and affections; and to lay an habitual restraint on all those passions, which war against the soul. We should watch, "lest any root of bitterness should spring up, and trouble us." We should keep out all blasphemous, envious, malicious, uncharitable, unchaste, revengeful,

vengeful, and, in a word, all impure thoughts, of every kind and description whatever. Vain is it to expect, that we can become partakers of the divine holiness, unless we begin with the heart. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, blasphemies, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness. And these are things, which defile a man." For these reasons, we should take particular care, that no impure ideas should become familiar to the mind. We should suppress the first rising of every unlawful passion. Should envy or malice knock at the door of our hearts, we should refuse them admittance. And we should endeavour to keep our minds always in such a state, that we should not blush to meet the eye of the world, could it penetrate our inmost recesses. So cautiously shall we guard our hearts, * if we wish to be holy in that sense, in which this perfection is ascribed to our maker.

SECONDLY—We are admonished to be circumspect in our conversation. All clamour and evil speaking; all profaneness, obscenity, and falsehood, are inconsistent

* "So cautiously shall we guard our hearts." Having repeated these words, the preacher lost his utterance, and fell backwards in the pulpit. His voice faltered in the sentence preceding, but here failed entirely. The nearest hearers sprang to his assistance. Reviving a little, he seemed desirous of addressing the congregation, and was raised on his feet; but he could only say, "my friends," when he sunk again. Being conveyed to his house, he soon became insensible, and expired before another day. Thus died, in the meridian of years and usefulness, this amiable and excellent man; the ornament of his profession and of human nature. But however untimely was his death, and awful and distressing the manner of it, yet, had he entertained a wish on the subject, it would probably have been, to be saved the anguish of a lingering disease, and to receive his summons, in the immediate service of his Master, and presence of his people.

ent with christian purity. If ambitious to be like God in the moral rectitude of his nature, we shall put away all lying, and speak truth every man with his neighbour. We shall speak evil of no one. We shall sacredly avoid every approach towards profaneness. Our lips will never be disgraced with the obscene effusions of a vain and sensual mind. All foolish talking and jesting will be reprobated by us. And our whole conversation will comport with the nature of that holy vocation wherewith we are called.

FINALLY—As God is holy, so ought we to make it our study, to be pure and undefiled in our outward behaviour. Whilst those, who know not God, indulge themselves in rioting and drunkenness, dissipation and wantonness, we, who profess to have some sense of right and wrong, should set a better example. In imitation of the most high, we should do justice to all men. We should be moderate in all our gratifications. Sensual excesses we should avoid as both our ruin and disgrace. And, actuated by a fixed aversion to wickedness in general, we should endeavour to keep at the utmost possible distance from every false and evil way. In short, as “the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teacheth, we should deny ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and live soberly, righteously, and piously in the world.” This is the sum of moral and christian duty. And conforming our actions to this rule, we shall display the image of God on our souls. We shall be followers of him, as dear children. And being like him in righteousness, and true holiness, we shall be prepared for the everlasting joys of his presence and kingdom.

I SHALL not pretend to point out the vices, which we must avoid, and the virtues, which we must practise, in order to attain to this resemblance. Holiness

is a most comprehensive term. It is not a single moral quality, but an assemblage of moral excellencies. It is sufficient, therefore, to say, that every positive offence, every omission of duty, every transgression, whether of thought, speech, or action, is inconsistent with the purity of the gospel. And, on the other hand, every act of obedience is included in that "holiness, without which no man can see the Lord." Wherefore, to use the words of the apostle, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, we must think on these things." These things are comprehended in the admonition of the apostle; and if they be in us, and abound, as "he, who hath called us, is holy, so shall we be holy in all manner of conversation."

It remains to make some reflections on the subject. And, first, if the supreme being be so far removed from all moral evil whatever, there is a just foundation for that reverence, love, and homage, which he demands of his creatures. We are so constituted, that moral excellencies, wherever they appear, command our admiration. We reverence the wise, and love the good amongst our own species. With what profound respect, and with what filial affection, must we then contemplate the character of God? How reasonable the command to "love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength"! How just the requisition, that we should worship him in public and private? should rejoice in his government, and submit to his authority? Well may the heavenly host employ their powers in celebrating the divine holiness.

holiness. It is a proper theme for angelick praises ; and with great propriety might all the intelligent creation join in their song : " Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints ! who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name ; for thou only art holy !"

SECONDLY—From the subject of this discourse, we are led to reflect on the vanity of all attempts to please God, without an habitual endeavour to imitate his perfections. What avail the prayers, which we offer, or the acknowledgments, which we make ? What avail the articles, which we believe, or the forms and ceremonies, which we observe ? These things can profit us nothing, unless we make it our study to be like God in holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. To render us partakers of his nature is the great end of all religion. All the precepts, all the prohibitions, all the motives, set before us in the gospel, tend to this point. So far, therefore, as we resemble the best of beings in his moral excellencies, we may lay claim to the character of Christians. And we may rely, that we fatally deceive ourselves, when we build on any other foundation.

THE necessity of studying the character of God, in order to know what we are to imitate, is a third observation arising from this subject. In vain are we exhorted to be followers of God, unless we have some rational conceptions of our leader. But, by a proper use of our understanding, such conceptions may be formed. The volumes of nature, providence, and revelation are before us. And in those volumes we may find all necessary information. If we peruse them with attention, we shall learn that God is the parent of his creatures, that he is infinitely holy, righteous,

righteous, benevolent, impartial, merciful, and faithful. And having made this discovery, we shall perceive what those excellencies are, which we should transcribe into ourselves. For want of such information, many have thought themselves followers of God, whilst they were displaying the temper of satan, and building up his kingdom in the world.

FINALLY—The subject of this discourse confirms the observation of the apostle, that “without holiness no man can see the Lord.” The blessed God is infinitely happy, because he is infinitely removed from all evil. And our happiness, beyond the grave, will be in exact proportion to our moral purity. If the gospel of Jesus Christ has purified our souls, and we have been recovered to the moral image of God, we shall assuredly be received into heaven, and partake of its exquisite delights. For being qualified for life and happiness, we shall be put into their immediate possession. But, if we are not holy in all manner of conversation, we must take the consequences of our depravity. Being unfit for the presence of God, we shall be spurned from it. And having laid the foundation of shame and misery in this world, they will assuredly overtake us in that which is to come. Having, therefore, dearly beloved, this assurance, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

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